

MONASTICISM IN A NEW AGE OF THE SPIRIT

by
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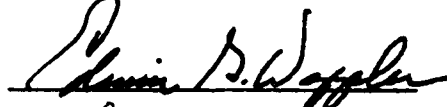
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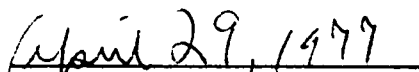
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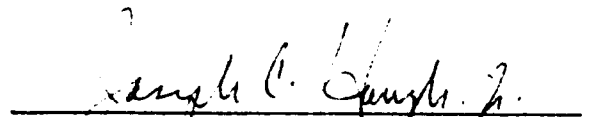

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE DESERT EXPERIENCE	15
3. MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY	32
4. THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY	53
5. MONASTICISM IN A NEW AGE OF THE SPIRIT	78
BIBLIOGRAPHY	97

ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is an exploration into the nature of genuine Christian spirituality in a modern secular age in which personal life, and the demanding social, political, and ecological issues of our day are increasingly approached and engaged in from a non-religious standpoint. The central thrust and aim contained within these pages is a descriptive analysis of the unique theological and ethical response of contemporary monastism to the problems confronting the Church of Jesus Christ in the 1970's. Special consideration is given to a relatively new semi-monastic community, Anglican sponsored yet ecumenical in approach, called the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation, of which the author of this thesis is an active companion-member. The cure or remedy suggested in the thesis here presented and supported is discovered in modern man's need to connect action with contemplation. Social, political, economic and ecological (and scientific) action are good and necessary, but separated from a healthy development of an active, contemplative inner life of the Spirit man becomes bitter in his condemnation of others, tends toward self-righteousness, becomes unproductive, and separates his life from its roots. What we need, as in the days of Galilee, is not more facts, but a new and joyful way of looking at and handling the facts.

The content of the five chapters of this thesis have been designed to introduce the reader to a grasp of Christian spirituality as understood from the viewpoint of several contemporary leaders and authorities in the area of contemplative experience. The most well

known of these is Thomas Merton, whose life and writings have significantly influenced the secular world as well as greatly enhanced the present renewal occurring within Christian circles.

Considerable attention is devoted to the theological existentialism and hesychastic spirituality of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The rich heritage of the mystical tradition of this branch of Christendom is presented as an antidote to so much rationalized spirituality offered on the market today. Any genuine Christian spirituality, true to the Biblical concepts of man, God, and the world, must relate to the whole of human existence as seen in the light of the Gospel and as experienced today through the action and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In the concluding chapter the reader is given a picture of the way the monastic vocation, as lived out in an agapé (love)-filled community, is designed to meet the spiritual needs of people. The focus is up on the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation, its *raison d'être*, and its contribution to society, the church, and the world.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"There are Two Ways: the Way of the world, and the Way of the Spirit. And there is a great difference between the Two Ways. One is a way of death, and the other is a way of life." ¹

The followers of Jesus Christ have always been aware of the great difference between the way of Jesus and the way of the world. Throughout the centuries, devout Christians have been painfully sensitive to the disparity between spirituality and the so-called "reality".

In the past two decades of the 'sixties and 'seventies we have been living through a clearly secularized existence with the tremendous onslaught of urban and technological developments. Having set his mind and hands to the plow of secularization, man is now reaping the results of our mass-produced society on wheels. It appears that "future shock" is here to stay. And for some time now, this shock wave of secularity in our age is being strongly felt within our churches across the land.

The gravest danger which the new trend of the secular society is presenting to the church universal is the loss of any genuine Christian spirituality. While many of the younger generation are turning to Oriental philosophies, yoga, and zen in order to satisfy a hunger for some meaning in life, the traditional forms of Christian spirituality are viewed as outdated and no longer relevant. It may be in vogue in the 'seventies to talk a great deal about religion, but few are willing to seek after an experiential knowledge of spiritual realities in their

¹ Thus begins The Didache, or "The Teaching of the Twelve", written by a second century Christian (unknown).

own lives. There is the undesirable danger of running the risk of being misunderstood, ridiculed, or even persecuted for outwardly expressing one's deep-felt beliefs.

How has the process of secularization of our culture crept into the life of the church? That even the local parish church has in many instances become very much in step with the market place did not strike me until only recently when I was called to be the Vicar of an "up and coming" mission in our Episcopal Church.

Before accepting this new position just over one year ago, I was told that this medium-sized congregation was managed by a group of very aggressive business executives. It was a highly organized mission with a well run committee structure. There was much emphasis on lay involvement in the management of the mission. The greatest need, according to the former priest, was in the area of spirituality. He informed me that the emphasis over the past three years was placed upon the social life of church members.

After the first six months I began to get a clear picture of the dynamics of this mission. The underlying norms, principles, and values of efficient management, pragmatism, and utilitarian principles took precedent over any interest in deepening the spiritual life of the congregation. "Fellowship" took the place of prayer life, golf and tennis groups preempted any study groups, and social activities met the need and obligation of the Gospel to minister in Christ's name to a broken world.

A very real question on the minds and in the hearts of all those who feel called to a closer walk with our Lord Jesus Christ is, what is

the future of spiritual existence in a modern culture that places little or no value on the next life, that order of reality which lies beyond the rationalistic-materialism of much scientific-atheistic inquiry?

Where does, or where can, one turn to pursue an inward calling to lead a life fully dedicated to seeking a closer union with God through leaving behind much of what the secular world deems "holy" and desirable? The Church's spirituality for most of its history in this country has manifested itself in concrete and practical ways and has been highly activist. Since pragmatism has been the ideology and instant results the test of functionality, there have been relatively few American mystics.

In 1967 when I entered Bloy House Theological School then located in Pasadena, I remember hearing a visiting speaker tell the student-body that this was an unpopular time to go into the ministry. We now lived in the post-Christian era, and whereas previously this could be called a "Christian" nation, the church was now a minority. Since that time I have witnessed a gradual decline in membership in my own denomination.

Fortunately, the seminary I attended emphasized the importance of prayer life and worship at the altar as the center of our theological training for the priesthood. In fact, it was our corporate life of worship and my personal prayer life that more than the class discussions persuaded me of the validity of the "calling" to enter the ordained ministry of the church. I had my fill of intellectual gymnastics in college studying linguistic philosophy under the tutelage of avowedly semantical atheists. I am grateful for learning the tools of logic and contemporary epistemology. Heaven knows we are to love God with all of

our minds, as our Lord himself instructed.

At Bloy House spirituality was no isolated, ivory tower activity remote from the secular society "out there". All of us worked in secular jobs during the week. Thus the struggle to clarify demarcations between the "sacred" and "secular", and the need to integrate these two spheres began from course #1. Nearly ten years later, the wrestling with this issue continues. However, the perspective is hopefully from a higher vantage point, seeing more of the forest for the trees. There is a new way opening and available in the 'seventies offering an alternative approach and response to the needs of contemporary society.

Then Yahweh said, "Write the vision down, inscribe it on tablets to be easily read, since this vision is for its own time only: eager for its own fulfillment, it does not deceive". ²

To some the grace was imparted through dreams, to others it was openly poured forth. For indeed by dreams the prophets saw, and received revelations. ³

As a seminary student trained in the art of higher criticism and deeply influenced by the reductionistic methodology of analytical philosophy, modern science, and Bultmannian demythologizers, passages from Scripture like the above seemed as remote as the Egyptian pyramids, some kind of relics carried over from the past. Only vaguely was I aware of the Medieval mystics who claimed to have received paranormal experiences that could only be described as "supernatural".

In the Fall of 1971, my notions of how one presumes to define "reality" were knocked out from under my feet. I learned that the Warden of Bloy House was resigning his post in order to launch out into

² Habakkuk 2:2 (Jerusalem Bible).

³ St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, V, 1.

the deep on a new adventure of faith as the result of a series of mystical experiences - visions granted to him from the Lord of the Living. Upon reading the accounts of these experiences, an intuitive voice within led me to believe in the validity and real significance of the Warden's encounter with the sacred.

It is a description of this new adventure of faith I wish to develop and explicate in this thesis. This adventure is designed specifically to help meet the spiritual needs of our time, to offer an alternative response to much of the secularity that has seeped in the institutional church.

The new adventure in faith I am referring to is the establishment of a semi-monastic community called the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation. It is one of the youngest monastic orders in the Episcopal Church, having been launched in February, 1972. The "OAR" actually had its beginning during the last days of September, 1971, when, according to the founder of the Order, St. Mary the Virgin appeared to him in a dream and St. Michael the Archangel in two visions. The gist of their message was this: "The only security is to surrender all dependence except the dependence on the Living Lord." The Church is on earth to proclaim salvation to men. But in many places we Christians have begun dancing to the tune of the market place. Liturgical renewal is good, but it only scratches the surface. "All this restlessness in the Church is like trying to rearrange furniture on the Titanic. The Lord of the Living is calling out for a new Remnant." ⁴

⁴ Enrico S. Molnar, "Order of Agapé and Reconciliation," New Life, (Anchor Society) 3:7 (January 1976), 12.

The Order of Agapé & Reconciliation is sponsored by the Episcopal Church, it is coeducational, including married men and women as well as single persons. Among the members - who are known as "companions" - there are Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant clergy and laity.

As a full time student enrolled at the School of Theology in Claremont in the Fall of 1971 and Spring of 1972, being a graduate of Bloy House, my personal interest in the OAR began to grow in proportion to my deepening need for greater depth in my own spiritual life. Especially once starting full time work in the parish ministry, I sorely missed the regular times of chapel worship and periods of quiet alone in my room in the Methodist dorms.

Where does the OAR, and other communities like it, fit (or not fit) into the framework of a modern culture that defines itself more and more in terms of non-religious thinking, of ethics which are more amoral than based on any socially accepted moral standards, and views itself primarily as a complex system of fragmented parts, each competing for the good of the individual? The answer to this question will be unfolded in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. A bird's eye view of the answer is now given in this introduction.

The OAR, as most other, older religious orders with their roots extending further into the past, is very concerned about the renewal of the world and contemporary culture as it is trying to bring about a true renewal in the Church of Christ, His Body on earth. The companions of the OAR do not love the world less, but Christ more. Popularly monasticism has been understood as a withdrawal from the secular affairs of

society, a turning of one's back on the social, political, economic, and personal perplexities of day to day living. Although this picture has a degree of truth in it, since of necessity a certain amount of "distancing" of oneself is imperative to the peculiar calling of the monastic life, in reality the truly contemporary religiously-oriented individual is very much caught up in the battle to transform secular culture into sacred cosmos. As I will try to show, contemporary monasticism offers a unique, modernistic approach to today's ills through the employment of a different kind of warfare. St. Paul describes this weaponry of the Christian in his Epistle to the Ephesians (6:10-18), "Therefore, take up God's armor. ."

The unique stance of contemporary monasticism today is seen in its particular viewpoint or vision of reality. In the words of the Prior of the OAR, the Rev. Enrico S. Molnar, "Today as in the days of Galilee, what we most need, if we are to recognize the convergence of the universe, is not so much new facts as a joyful new way of looking at and handling facts. A new way of seeing, combined with a new way of acting: that is what we need." ⁵

To this task the community of the OAR has set its sight and its physical energies. Depending upon the particular circumstances and gifts and talents of the companions, some are called to a life spent primarily in the sphere of contemplative prayer, study, daily liturgical celebrations, and conducting retreats. These companions make up the "core group" of men and women who live in the community life at the Priory

⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

located high up in the Manzano Mountains south-east of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The Priory offers pilgrim-visitors a place of refreshment, a beautiful and tranquil atmosphere where they can prepare themselves to return to secular society with a renewed sense of devotion and commitment to the will of God.

In November of 1976 Dr. Joseph Hough, Dean of the School of Theology, spoke to a convocation of ministers and students on the subject, "Christian faith and hope in a time of crisis".⁶ In this excellent and sobering talk Dean Hough spoke the plain truth about the present crisis facing our world and the trends which are casting their shadow of doubt upon any optimism concerning the future of the human race. The result is a loss of hope that is "shaking the foundation of the heavenly city of the 18th century". And many intellectuals believe this situation may not be merely generational or cyclical but indeed is signaling the concrete end of human history, according to Dean Hough.

Three trends in our time referred to by Dean Hough are: (1) the technology of warfare with the awful potential for global destruction, (2) new technologies of production causing undreamed of rates of consumption; as population explosions put increasing strains upon natural resources, the new technology brings us "not closer to paradise but cosmic destruction", and (3), we are living in a world of increasing political unrest and conflict over the just distribution of goods among

⁶ Opinion expressed in an address by Joseph Hough, Jr., Christian faith and hope in a time of crisis, School of Theology at Claremont, November 1976 (tape on file in the School's tape library).

the peoples of the world. These trends combined with the secular view of reality as lacking a metaphysical base has produced a climate of intellectual despair and the loss of hope concerning any new golden age just around the corner. Indeed, there may never be any golden age to come if these trends continue unimpeded along their paths toward destruction.

What, then, is the role of Christian faith and hope in this crisis? The answer given by Dean Hough was that the role of Christian faith is to provide the context to keep hope alive. It is the vital role of maintaining "hope against hope" when all historical evidence seems to point to a vacuum where hope once reigned. Paraphrasing the words of St. Francis of Assisi we can say, "where there is despair, O Lord, let me sow hope".

Down through the centuries monastic communities have been centers and lighthouses of hope, especially in the darker periods of history. Some feel we may now be entering another such dark age. Not only through study but through living participation has monasticism kept in contact with the primitive forms of its theological and contemplative experience of hope. Perhaps this is the most vital role of contemporary monasticism in today's world. Dean Hough concluded his talk by outlining three areas of concern which become the "work" of hope. These three areas belong to the concern and the rationale of such communities as the OAR.

First, there is the need to "celebrate" hope. When the absence of God and His action in history is experienced in the secular city, there is the need for circles where God's presence is very real. These circles must be places where there is very little true joy, and be light to the world. The first note of the five notes or principles of the OAR

is joy. Joy has always been the cardinal virtue recognized in the lives of all the saints.

Also, according to Dean Hough, these circles or Christian communities are to rely upon both the memory of the Christian past (with ultimate dependence on God himself and His promises), and to anticipate the fact of the future coming Kingdom. As Dean Hough put it, the Christian is a realist in that he sees things as they are, but this is not the whole picture, the complete vision necessary. The Christian also "presses for a vision of things not yet". This is to celebrate hope.

This visionary approach of attempting to live out a balance between our permanent spiritual roots of the past (Tradition) and the evolutionary possibilities of the eschatologically new, while at the same time keeping both feet firmly planted in the present order, describes the challenge adopted by contemporary monasticism. As one called to a contemplative life, however, the monk, says Merton, must

retain his fundamental sense of identity and vocation by affirming in his life and work this orientation to the definitive (eschatological) truth, which is God Himself. It is in this fidelity to the truth of his own vocation that he renders service to the activist and the scientist who need his witness to the hidden definitive ground of their own visible and provisional certitudes. "Faith, in so far as it is faith," says Heinrich Ott, "maintains its direction to the last truth, the definitive and irrevocable truth." But the great temptation is to substitute the provisional, the penultimate (Bonhoeffer) for the ultimate, to claim that one has reached the end when one has not begun, to announce that one is going to the North Pole and then take a walk around the block (Kierkegaard).⁷

While monastic communities should be lights pointing the way to the future hope, as well as illuminating the present by celebrating the

⁷ Thomas Merton, Contemplation in a World of Action (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 204.

gifts spiritual and material and hope already provided us in the "future present", a second important "work" of hope, Dean Hough stated, is the establishment of communities where God's people can be truly for each other. The need for these kind of caring communities, in which individuals experience on a deep and meaningful level real 'koinonia'; acceptance, love, and personal and interpersonal growth, is strongly felt today in our world and in the church. In the OAR companions are to practice love for one another and all creation above all else. In one of his meditations given during the Order's annual "Great Retreat" in July of 1976, the Prior told us that "the note of Agapé, God's love, underlies all creation. I hope that by now we all know how absolutely basic, quintessential, to Christianity and to the essence of the Order, is Agapé. As Saint Maximus the Confessor says,

Christian love, of which obedience and nonviolence are the inseparable expressions, is primarily our formal profession of faith in the Gospel message that the Kingdom has already been established, and that the Lord of Truth is indeed risen and reigning over His Kingdom now.

In other words, he is saying that, not being filled with love, and not practicing love, agapé, is denying or doubting the reality of the presence of His kingdom in our midst.⁸

The third work of hope is the hope held out for the whole world, namely, for people to be who they are called to be. Dean Hough called this the "divine and holy madness of hope", since we as Christians believe there still is hope for the removal of racism and oppression, and the possibility of a world in which there is plenty and peace. As

⁸ Enrico S. Molnar, A Spiritual Pilgrimage for Christ (Tajique, NM: Order of Agapé and Reconciliation, 1976) p. 18.

Christians we are to "hope against hope" because we are promised a new world, not a fantasy world somewhere. The Dean himself raised the listening audience's hope by reminding us that what we are doing can make a big difference, even while it is God's responsibility to do the rest. Our task is to keep our spirituality related to action by acting in love and living in love. (Amen!)

The OAR and much of contemporary monasticism is committed to this work of reconciliation. This work in the world is carried out in a wide diversity of ways and means according to the distinctive characteristics of individual monastic communities. In the January, 1976 issue of "New Life" magazine, there is a compendium of articles on 19 religious orders in the Episcopal Church. In the introduction the editor says,

The holy examples which are given to us by so many dedicated monks and nuns in the Body of Christ should be an inspiration to us all. The peace, the serenity, the stability, the compassion, the activity, the prayers, the love, the quiet - these are all gifts which Religious give to us to support us out in the secular world as we try to live our lives in the fullness of Christ.⁹

Before turning to the description of the adventure and alternative response of monastic life, perhaps some further clarification is needed as to what is referred to by the words "secular", "secularism", and "secularization". "Secularism" is a dogmatic view, a rigid set of beliefs which are set over and against religious belief. It is therefore, the atheistic position that ours is a godless, closed universe. "Secularization" refers to a process - social, political, and economic

⁹ Molnar, "Order of Agapé and Reconciliation", p. 1.

which approaches all issues of life without the employment of religious precepts. The person or group which adopts a "secular" attitude tries to interpret every question from a scientific, empirical standpoint. There is much merit in this approach, as will be seen later on in the contemplative understanding of human experience. However, the danger characteristic of secular thinking is that it denies the existence, or even the possibility, of there being any "holy ground". Human experience becomes defined in too narrow categories that tend to blur reality rather than shed new light on the facts which are already known to exist.

The most dangerous form of secularity is found where, in the name of relevance, the Church and religion seeks to adjust itself to the times. Jacob Needleman, philosopher-psychologist of San Francisco State College, asks very pertinent questions:

As church and synagogue turn to psychiatry, the scientific world-view, or social action, are they not turning toward what has failed and is failing? and has not the very failure of these non-religious enterprises shifted the common mind back to a renewed interest in the religious? Men turn to religion and find, to their ultimate dismay, that religion turns to them, to their sciences, their ideas of action and accomplishment, and their language. This is what is known as secularization: the effort by religion to be 'relevant,' to 'solve' human problems, to make men 'happy.' ¹⁰

What Needleman and others are saying is that what modern man needs today is not more organization or sociability; he needs a savior. He needs basic, not complete, answers for the basic problems of his existence that no social, secular organization can provide. So much of

¹⁰ William McNamara, The Human Adventure: Contemplation for Everyman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), p. 55, citing Jacob Needleman, The New Religions (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

our Christianity is no more than social humanism at a time when people are discovering the inadequacies of all such merely humanistic stopgaps and are beginning to hunger for God.

Chapter 2

THE DESERT EXPERIENCE

"Fasting is only one branch of a large and momentous duty, the subdual of ourselves to Christ. We must surrender to him all we have, all we are. We must keep nothing back." ¹

"It is not enough to leave Egypt, one must also enter the Promised Land." ²

In the introduction I stated my purpose as the task of describing a "new" adventure of faith begun as the result of the formation of a modern, semi-monastic community called the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation. In the final chapter of this thesis I will discuss more fully the orientation, raison d'etre, and the particular life style of the OAR.

While the OAR is "new" in the sense of its recent appearance in the historical scene, the whole of monasticism shares in a common experience whose roots extend into the distant past. An understanding and grasp of the nature of this universal experience of all monastic life, old and new, therefore, will help us begin to acquire a greater insight into the inner purposes and distinct goal sought by all who have been, and are today, called to participate in the "desert experience". ³

The desert experience is a central theme that runs through all of the great traditions of the great religions. Most emphatically it is found in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

¹ John Henry Newman, cited in Bless the Lord (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1974)

² St. John Chrysostom, cited in Bless the Lord.

³ Theme expressed by Fr. William McNamara, OCD, "The Desert Experience" Spiritual Life Institute, Sedona, AZ, 1974 (tape on file at the Institute).

Perhaps a good instance to begin with in order to convey the centrality and the meaning of the desert experience would be to contemplate the towering figure of the Old Testament, Moses. After living so many years in the city and running into so much trouble there, he went into the desert, into the wilderness where he encountered the living God.

It was there in the silence, solitude, and stark reality of the emptiness and darkness of the desert that Moses was enabled to encounter Yahweh himself and to be led into the Promised Land. It was there alone that Moses confronted himself, the ground of his own being, where he encountered the reality of things as they are, and thereby was led into union with the awful, almost unbearable reality of God.

And it was in subsequence of this mystical experience of Moses that all the significant historical events of Israel took place. It was there in the wilderness that God established the covenant and created Israel as a community. It was in the desert that God revealed His Name and gave to Moses the Law. Thus through Moses' experience God brought about the three most significant events in the Old Testament: the establishment of His covenant with the people of Israel, the revelation of His Name, and the giving of the Law.

Already we can begin to see the significance of the desert experience which had a decisive effect upon not only one individual's life but that of a whole people. The Israelites were enjoying their comfortableness of enslavement in the cities of Egypt. If they had stayed in Egypt against Moses' inducement to follow him into the deserts of Sinai they would have lost the great opportunity to become God's own chosen

people. They would have eventually blended into Egyptian culture, lost all of their distinctive spirituality as a people, never again to be heard from. It took the stripping down experience of the desert to bring Moses face to face with reality. This experience, also, the Israelites must pass through in order to reach the Promised Land.

God was leading Moses and the Jews into a deeper dimension of human experience. Leaving the city and entering into the desert they had to simplify, get rid of all excess baggage, remove all false idols, break loose from all forms of enslavement, and begin to see things as they are in themselves. It was in the starkness of the desert that they began to see through and beyond the superficiality and so much of the surface activity of their comfortable enslavement.

The primary purpose of God in leading the Jews through the desert into the Promised Land was to guide them into an experience of an immediacy and direct encounter with a vision of Himself as He reveals Himself to be. The goal of finally reaching the Promised Land in and through the desert experience was to bring the Jews to the place where they could discover within the depths of their souls and human experience the reality and enjoyment of the living God. They were learning to depend upon Him alone as so many externals were taken away from them.

The next great figure was Elijah. Israel had regressed in the Canaanite lands, taking on the bondage of the cities of this country. They had taken on more and more false gods, and they were circumventing God by going from distraction to distraction, once again avoiding the inner reality of God's presence for fear of discernment of His judgment.

Elijah recognized this, and so he spent forty days and forty

nights walking into the desert. And there he spent time in concentrated solitude and silence so that he became a "God-intoxicated" man.

Elijah did not seek mere isolation from the problems of the city, as one running away from the responsibility to confront the dilemmas facing the Jewish people. He sought a place of solitude where he was thrust into a deeper union with the needs of his people and with God. His solitude did not deprive him of the company of people or of all dimensions of reality. Because God is distinct and not a separate being, Elijah in the company of the immediate reality of God's presence was simultaneously propelled into the spiritual company of God's world, God's creation, and His people. In the words of Sr. Julianne Allen, the call to a life of solitude entails an encounter not only with the word of God and becoming one in Him, it is also a way of finding the love and presence of all men and women: "the joys and pains of men and women are carried with one into this solitude. It is in this solitude that one finds and loves all persons in the presence of the word." ⁴

So Elijah, in his experience of solitude in the desert was able to come to terms with the crises of the Jews in that day. In fact, he was very much involved in the political and economic curses of the day. He even solved a weather problem, a three year drought!

It was the result of this desert experience that gave to Elijah a strength and fearlessness characteristic of a man of God. Elijah stood in the full assembly of all his countrymen and with acrimonious

⁴ St. Julianne Allen, S.S.M.N., "Encountering the Word and the World", Probe: National Assembly of Women Religious, VI: 2 (November 1976).

invective he chided them with indecision. He said "How long will you sit on the fence? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him." ⁵

The desert experience of Elijah is a great example of a kind of vocation which does not isolate a man, does not induce him to withdraw or flee from the world. He goes into the desert to be refreshed, staying there long enough to be imbued with power from on high. He returns to the cities not with his own self-made plans to correct the ills of the day. Rather, he went into the desert where his own ego died and in the process discovered that his more real, fundamental, transcendent self appeared. This is the image of the living God, the Christ-self, beginning to emerge in him. Thus he became a more transparent instrument of God's plan, not his own.

About a hundred years after Elijah came another prophet who summed things up in a magnificent way, and that was Hosea. God said through him to the people of Israel, the bride, "I will betroth her (you), lead her (you) out into the desert and there speak to her (your) heart." ⁶ According to McNamara⁷ this is a marvellous summation of the whole spiritual life of our whole Christian existence.

It emphasizes first of all that it is God who takes the initiative. It is God who offers the gratuitous gift, who loves and pursues us. All we can do is to respond. But when we begin to respond to the love of God we begin to be. And out of this being will flow authentic

⁵ I Kings 18:21 (NEB).

⁶ Hosea 2:14, 19 (Jerusalem Bible).

⁷ McNamara.

and effective action. "We cannot give what we do not have", says McNamara. "That is why action without contemplation is blind." ⁸

To allow ourselves the privilege of being, without any utilitarian purposes whatsoever, is an essential element of the desert experience. Perhaps the most subtle enemy of any genuine Christian spirituality is the compulsion we feel to fill up every moment with doing things, with trying always to accomplish something. Even our leisure time or a vacation is associated with some pragmatic purpose in mind such as "for therapy" or "getting rested up in order to return to work". These motives are well and good, but in a spiritual sense they are insufficient to allow that greater penetration into the deeper aspects of our human nature.

Last summer at the beginning of the "Great Retreat" at St. Michael's Forest Valley Priory, the Prior told the retreatants to be "Useless" for a few days. We all gave a sigh of relief. In order to advance spiritually, to be enabled to listen to the still small voice of God speaking in the heart, demanded a complete retreat from all the noise, confusion, and attachments to the demands "back home".

There is another very important message Hosea is telling us, as he spoke the truth of God to the Jewish nation, and that is that our ultimate vocation in life is "spiritual matrimony with God" (McNamara).⁹ God through Hosea said, "I will betroth you".¹⁰ Elijah helped to solve

⁸ Ibid.: "Contemplation" is another name for what occurs in the "desert experience". The life of contemplation is the subject of the following chapter.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hosea 2:19 (NEB)

the political and economic problems of the Jews, now Hosea out of his desert experience offered a solution to their identity crisis.

To the extent that we are conscious of the fact that we are loved by God, we no longer need to find our identity or identify ourselves by looking to the most contemporary forms of work. Being loved by God is the essential cause of our identity, as Hosea recognized long ago. This was a most significant stage of development in the spiritual consciousness of the Jewish people. How did it come? - it came through the desert experience of Hosea who heard God speaking to him in the quiet place of his inner soul.

McNamara states that God gives us our identity and definition as human persons by God's creative love "recreating us over and over again until we are transformed into Christ and we become God by participation".¹¹ This is the opposite of "original sin" which is man's attempt to become like God in a selfish, narcissistic way, in an autonomous way. Rather we are transformed into God by intimate participation in His being. This heart of the contemplative and monastic experience will be further dealt with in the following two chapters.

In a more psychological vein, McNamara provides us with insight into the inner process of transformation that occurs as a result of the desert experience.

It is important to keep in mind the sequence of events in the whole process. God said He would lead Hosea (and the Jewish people) into the desert first, as a pre-condition or pre-requisite, and then He

¹¹ McNamara.

could speak to the heart of His prophet.

Why the desert? What was the desert good for? Anyone who has been on a silent retreat or has spent long periods in solitude, especially in a remote spot such as the desert (not Palm Springs or Las Vegas) or mountains, will have some idea as to the answer.

The answer provided by McNamara is that the desert is essentially good for contemplation. His definition of contemplation is "a long, loving look at reality".¹² To contemplate is to look intensely at the real . . . that occurs as a result of the desert experience. It is what modern psychology would call becoming a whole and integrated human being. As we will see, to become a whole person through contemplative experience is to become unfragmented in the sense of having one's conflicting desires, thoughts and emotions brought into greater harmonization.¹³

Psychologists such as Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, and others, have indicated that the single, greatest cause of neurosis in this country is our dominant American pursuit of happiness. We have become neurotic people due to our mad pursuit of happiness. Our secular society is built for speed and efficiency and neglects the deeper aspects of our human nature.

As mentioned earlier, modern day secularity has made its inroads into the spiritual life of the church. As a logical consequence, most of our churches are fast becoming a spiritual wasteland; some have

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See chapter 3; also chapter 5 with reference to the achievement of a "final integration".

already dried up. This is the great tragedy of our time.

As McNamara points out, one reason for the many changes today, in the church as well as in the world, changes which are ineffectual and questionable, is that these are mere accommodations made for the happiness of mankind. All of this is clearly in contradistinction to the true task of the church in any age, namely, to bring about the radical change of attitude or 'metanoia' necessary to enable man to be real, to be full, to pursue truth and holiness (become whole).

McNamara speaks about the "tyranny of diversion" of a secularized existence. This produces in us multiple, conflicting desires and we are torn apart or fragmented. It is nearly impossible to be still, clearly focused, or to be tranquil. The Lord was saying to Hosea, in effect, "once you become undistracted, once you become unfragmented, once you become single-minded and gather all your dispersed forces into a unifying, simple focus, then I will speak to your heart". "To contemplate is to live on the spot where you are, undistracted, undiverted, unfragmented", says McNamara. ¹⁴

The desert is the ideal place to set the stage for this kind of contemplative experience in three ways: (1) the utter simplicity of the landscape, (2) the silence, and (3) the solitude offered in the wilderness.

The desert is a challenge, a kind of contest to see whether we can come to terms with the bare facts of reality. Going from Egypt to the Promised Land may be described as a journey beginning first with a

¹⁴ McNamara.

confrontation of the stark reality of nature where every non-essential is stripped away. Once man is alone, with no one else to depend on, he now sees the reality of his naked self - often the devastated inner ground of his being. Having penetrated into the depths of his self, the deeper reality awaiting his search is the awesome reality of the living God.

The final desert man that precedes Christ is John the Baptist. His was a severe, ascetical life, a style of living apparently that of a hermit in the wilds. He came marching out of the desert to prepare the Jews to meet their Messiah. He made straight the way for the Lord.

Christ, himself, was and is the supreme desert figure. In the gospels the life of Christ is directly related to the desert experience. It is not just an episode in the life of Christ. Jesus' whole life can be viewed as being oriented to his own desert experience. Jesus made his important decision in the desert, and the hanging on the Cross was simply the sign and the meaning of what happened in the desert. It was through Christ's decision out of his own free will that led him to offer himself totally and obediently to death on the Cross.

Christ's whole life was essentially orientated toward the Father. In the New Testament Jesus used the word 'abba' over 170 times. It was his relationship with the Father which was the very essence of his entire life and active ministry while he walked this earth. Jesus is constantly going into the desert or up into the mountains because of the absorbing reality of his Father. This was his sustaining source of his active career, going into these places of silence and solitude in order to be fed and filled with new life that came from his oneness with his Father. Christ was most certainly a "man for others"

(Bonhoeffer), yet he was essentially the man from the Other.

We have now come a long way on our journey through the "desert experience" from Moses in the Old Testament to the supreme embodiment and manifestation in history of the new covenantal relationship with God through Jesus of Nazareth. From here on out the pattern for the way of perfection is for all time permanently established in and through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the living Son of the living God.

It was Christ Himself who instituted the monastic or "religious" way of life. A rich young man once came to Him and said: "Good Master, what must I do to be saved?" The Lord replied: "You know the precepts of God. Just keep them and you will be saved." But the rich man was already living this way of the precepts (as do most Church people). So he sought further dedication, saying, "All these things I have kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?" Then it was, according to the view of traditional Catholic spirituality, that Christ formulated for him the principles of what we now call the Religious Life: "Oh, if you would be perfect, - if you are seeking a special opportunity of being generous with God and of doing something more than merely obeying the precepts - go, sell all you have, distribute to the poor, thus simplifying your life; then come and follow me in complete obedience!" ¹⁵ Here we have the Lord's own authority for a Way of Perfection.

During His earthly life, Jesus Himself lived a community life with His apostles. It is in imitation of Him that men and women ever since have sought to embrace this way of life in a religious order. And

¹⁵ Luke 18:18-23 (paraphrased).

in the early Church there were ascetics who lived dedicated lives in their homes or in the Egyptian desert, as did their predecessors Moses, Elijah, Hosea, and John the Baptist.

And so before we turn in the next chapter to a fuller development and description of religious or monastic spirituality, let us take one more brief look at this "desert experience" as it grew up in the early Church. This is a whole study in itself, however I believe that an understanding of the "roots" of western monasticism is required in order to grasp the meaning of the religious life in our own time. It is a most significant fact of history that the monastic life as a vocation within the universal church throughout the world not only has precedent and validity grounded in the Old Testament period, but has itself enjoyed an unbroken tradition down the centuries. In fact, during the Dark Ages (7th-9th centuries), when the progress of western civilization seemed to come to a standstill, it was in the great monasteries of Europe that was preserved for the rest of the world all the great learning of the past. In many places it was the monk who was the only one who knew how to read or write. So we can accurately say that monastic communities have often been lights shining in periods of darkness.

Monasticism in the East began with the emergence of the "Desert Fathers" during the fourth century. The most well known among the desert figures are St. Antony and St. Pachomius, both of whom exerted a great influence upon all future ascetical life. Both of these men felt compelled to abandon the cities in an effort to preserve the depth and values of Christian existence.

In a recent paperback book entitled, The Rule of St.

Benedict,¹⁶ the authors and translators give three central causes of the movement of individual and groups of Christians away from their city life and away from the Christian communities. First, there was a tremendous effect upon the life of the Church starting with the Roman Emperor Constantine's "Edicts of Toleration" proclaimed in the year 311. This edict gave Christianity its first official recognition and imperial patronage in the Roman Empire. The effect of this patronage and the frequent favors bestowed upon the Church by the Emperor produced certain negative consequences. The Church and her members now enjoyed a new security and status never before granted to followers of Christ. "The Church and many of its members found Christianity and the world quite compatible."¹⁷ To those who felt they could no longer interact with both, the Egyptian desert proved a welcome refuge for these ascetics, and they tended to live there as hermits in caves, excavated tombs, temple ruins and the like.

The second thrust in the development of monasticism came from the thinking and principles laid down by Origen of Alexandria, a Church Father who died in the mid-third century (254). It was Origen's desire to express the Christian experience as an orderly, rational pattern of perfection based upon sound philosophical principles. "Origen saw man as co-operating in the process of his own sanctification, the outcome of union with God. He further saw the process of attaining holiness/union as an ascent to be accomplished by steps or degrees. These steps

¹⁶ Benedict, The Rule of St. Benedict (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975). ¹⁷ Ibid.

had to be taken by a man." ¹⁸ And his only access to these stages of development was the practice of ascetism. This concept suggested the image of the ladder, and so these two combined quickly became an indispensable element of ascetic thinking and living.

The third great force which prompted the growth of the monastic ideals and practices was the decline and disintegration of the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century. With the onslaught of barbarian invaders from the north, Rome and its civilization itself seemed on the verge of extinction. Suddenly many who were experiencing a sense of security and stability, and who had welcomed the alliance between Christianity and the political powers of the world, began to take pause and were forcibly reminded that their Kingdom was not of this world.

It appeared that there were only two alternative courses to choose from. An individual could continue to pursue material goals in a growing, shaky situation, or else he could turn his energies to the quest for God and eternal rewards. Many Christians in the East chose the latter course. A number of these fled to the Egyptian desert. Antony the Great, who died at 105 in 396, had perhaps the greatest influence upon many who followed the example of his desert experience. In his story of the life of Antony, Athanasius presents the picture of the ideal ascetic, progressing step-by-step to sanctification and union with God. Strict ascetism and self-denial were the keynotes of Antony's reaching the spiritual heights.

Like his predecessors of old, Antony discovered in the desert a

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

confrontation with stark reality. A new dimension, however, has now been added to the experience of solitude and silence, and the stripping away of distractions. These early hermits firmly believed that it was in the habitations of the desert wilderness that the evil spirits and powers of the dark world, which St. Paul spoke about, maintained their home base. If you wanted to do direct battle with Satan and all the forces of evil, the desert was the place of action. The desert was in no sense considered an escape hatch, a comfortable "retreat" from city life. "Robbers, real and hallucinatory demons, temptations, boredom, anxiety, despair, physical privations and excessive penitential watchings, fasts and prayers combined to destroy the unwary and the proud with frightening ease." ¹⁹ Living a monastic life is never a cop-out, one meets different sorts of reality.

Pachomius, a contemporary of Antony and for a time a Roman soldier, is credited by a fourth-century tradition of founding the cenobitic or enclosed communal life-style. He decided to build a wall around the huts of his ascetics, separating them from the world and joining them to one another. They came together for spiritual instruction and worship. They were united by a "Rule of Life". Thus, they were free to pursue their individual quest for perfection and union with God without the anxieties and dangers of living in solitude. The seeds of community life were planted by Pachomius, and later Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) saw the religious community as the only place in which the true ideal of Christian perfection could be completely realized. Only the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

community provided its members with the opportunity of constantly practicing charity (agape) and self-sacrifice, the safeguards against one's own selfishness. "Only the community with its diverse gifts of body and spirit could accept and be transformed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit in their fullness. Within the community the individual was to exercise his talents and let his gifts illumine his brothers, while he shared in the effects of theirs".²⁰

We are now in a position to look back and view the desert experience as a unique kind of journey, one which is, at the same time, both a journey inward and a journey outward. For Moses and the Jewish people the journey outward meant leaving behind all ties to their home in Egypt and heading straight out into the desert wastes, into the utter simplicity, solitude and silence. It was there that God chose to reveal His Name, give the Law, and create them into the covenantal people of God. For Hosea, the journey inward ended in receiving God's message, "I will espouse you", which he passed on to the Israelites. In the Desert Fathers we see clearly the call for many Christians to adopt the way of perfection.

What, then, is the ultimate goal of the desert experience? In brief, it is to come to that place in our lives where we can take a long, loving look at the real, and beyond that to the absolutely real presence of the living God. The desert experience, McNamara tells us "exposes us to our own nothingness", i.e., the existential awareness that "apart from God we are nothing". This is what causes us to "fling

²⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

ourselves with abandon on the might and power and creative love of God and become whom we are invited and created and graced to become by His ingenuity, His mercy, His love, and by His matrimonial proposals".²¹

²¹ McNamara.

Chapter 3

MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY

"The whole life of a saint is one mighty integrated prayer." ¹

"Prayer does not blind us to the world, but it transforms our vision of the world, and makes us see it, all men, and all the history of mankind, in the light of God." ²

"Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. Amen." ³

In the concluding chapter of his book entitled: "St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality", John Meyendorff, Professor of Church History and Patristics at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York City, makes reference to modern man's discontent with too much "rationalized spirituality" that is being offered as the essence of Christianity. We are now living in a time when the optimism of the humanism of a former day now is shrinking back before terrifying perspectives revealed in the unlimited progress of "autonomous" science. "Man now begins to see that the self-deification for which he has sought in vain is an illusion. Yet he is now well aware of the staggering power within matter itself to be content any longer with the more or less rationalized spirituality sometimes offered as the essence of Christianity. He seeks for a God who is present and acting in history, in man as he is, in the reality of daily life." ⁴

¹ Origen, cited in Bless the Lord, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1975).

² Thomas Merton, cited in Bless the Lord.

³ The "Jesus Prayer", author unknown. (See p.36 of this chapter.)

⁴ John Meyendorff, St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974) p. 175.

Since the main subject and expressed purpose of this thesis is to present a contemporary rendering, or viewpoint, of "monastic spirituality", with specific reference to the orientation of the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation, a few clarifying comments at the outset are necessary.

The terms 'spirit' and 'spirituality' appear either vague, perhaps utterly opaque to many, or at best they convey real significance in the lives of dedicated, religiously-oriented individuals. Most of us are now trained to be sufficiently uneasy concerning the use of particular words in our everyday, and especially ecclesiastical or "church", languages - not implying that these are two separate kinds of language, although there would be obvious barriers to overcome, say, talking to the average man on the street about the 'Paraclete'.

Because of the danger of both overdefinition and underdefinition of a particular term, I will not attempt a definition of "spirituality" at this juncture. The philosophical wisdom of Wittgenstein's famous dictum: "the meaning is its use" is appropriate here. As we become familiar with the uses of "spirituality" in this chapter, the rich meaning and application of this term will hopefully be elucidated.

It is clearly evident that the area of Christian spirituality is itself inclusive of a wide scope of subjects, and has been expressed in a large variety of forms throughout church history. My concern here will be to describe in some detail what is known as the "hesychast" tradition of spirituality preserved and passed on to us from the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is one of the oldest forms of Christian spirituality which, in my view, is strikingly pertinent for us today precisely because it is so faithful to the Biblical concept of God and man, and

because of the total freedom of its piety, centered on the unique reality alone - on Jesus, the Son of God Incarnate.

In the OAR, Orthodox spirituality is very much part and parcel of the ethos of this Anglican sponsored order. As members of the OAR, and being Episcopalian, we are also interested in other forms of spirituality that come out of the church in the West. Episcopalians always pride themselves in gleaning the best out of both traditions. Gold is gold no matter which mine it come from. Therefore I will include in this chapter some reflections upon the subject of spirituality from two or three modern monastic figures representing the West. This is an age of bridge building among traditions, extracting similarities and points of contact rather than maintaining an attitude of exclusivism.

One final comment to keep in mind. The theological existentialism and hesychast spirituality of the Orthodox Church are two necessary, complementary aspects of the one and the same truth. Since this is the case, there will be inevitable overlap between this chapter and the next, which will deal specifically with the theological aspect of the one truth.

"O light of Orthodoxy, teacher of the Church, its confirmation! O ideal of monks and invincible champion of theologians! O wonder-working Gregory, glory of Thessalonika and preacher of grace! Always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved!" ⁵ The Orthodox Church chants this hymn to St. Gregory Palamas in the liturgy of the second Sunday in Lent, in veneration of the man who, several decades

⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

before the fall of Byzantium, integrated "hesychasm", Eastern Christianity's ancient tradition of contemplative monasticism, in a doctrinal synthesis. Hesychasm is a monastic movement whose origins go back to the Fathers of the desert. It cannot claim to be the only "orthodox" mysticism, which has always taken varied forms. But Palamas himself can be called a master of "orthodox mysticism" inasmuch as his work transcends the limits of one school of spirituality.

By the time of Palamas (14th century), Eastern monasticism already had a rich heritage of writings, which Palamas himself accepted in whole. His work and great contribution was to emphasize the valuable doctrinal and spiritual elements of this tradition at a time when the new spirit of the Renaissance posed a threat to the essence of Christianity. Many values held to be absolute in the Middle Ages were being swept away. Not unlike today, there arose an autonomy of the intellect and of nature itself which endangered the continuing existence of the spiritual life, beyond the realm of all purely human achievement. It was the work of Palamas that brought a solution to these problems.

As we saw in the previous chapter, primitive monasticism can be seen as having its roots in the Jewish prophets, who in their attacks on the conformism of established religion had developed a whole "desert" spirituality. In the fourth century A.D. monasticism renewed this prophetic ministry of ancient Israel in the church. Those who fled the Roman cities became a witness against the new compatibility between the way of the world and the way of the church. Throughout the history of the Orthodox East, the Church was saved from absorption into the Empire by the hermits of the desert and the monastic communities. "The essence

of their testimony was that of the New Testament, not of the Old, in so far as the latter identified the chosen people with the nation and the state. Against the theocratic claims of the Christian Empire the monks affirmed that the Kingdom of God is of the world to come; it is not a sociological or political phenomenon in human history; it is the very Presence of God." ⁶

And the monks were the authoritative spokesmen for the Eastern Church. The church adopted their liturgy, their spiritual way, their type of holiness. We will observe a change within the Eastern Church from the individualistic piety of the desert hermits to the communal form of spirituality. The Church came to condemn religious individualism and the monks were put under the authority of the local bishops and were thus integrated into that nucleus of Christian life, the local church.

However, the rich debt we owe to the early monks who deliberately withdrew from the communal life of the church was their insistence upon prayer as the essential and positive element in Christian spirituality. The monks saw the New Testament precepts on prayer as their surest way to receive the grace of redemption.

"This is the kind that can only be driven out by prayer." ⁷

"Pray without ceasing." ⁸

Especially this later scriptural injunction has had a challenging and lasting effect upon many, monks and non-monastic alike. This

⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷ Mark 9:29 - Jerusalem Bible.

⁸ I Thessalonians 5:17 - KJV.

particular verse inspired the well known "Jesus Prayer", now becoming popular today in the West.

Before studying more carefully the great significance of the "Jesus Prayer" in the development of Eastern spirituality, we must first become acquainted with the perpetual "prayer of the mind", a notion attributed to Evagrius of Pontus (399).

Evagrius was the first intellectual to adopt the life of the hermits in the Egyptian desert. Not content with imitating their ascetic practices and manner of prayer, he tried to integrate them into a metaphysical and anthropological system inspired by Neoplatonism. Evagrius was the first great codifier of the monastic doctrine of prayer.

Here are several of his "Chapters", which were to provide a mystical spirituality and vocabulary for following generations:

- 3. Prayer is a continual intercourse of the mind with God.
- 5. Pray first for the gift of tears so that by means of sorrow you may soften your native rudeness. Then having confessed your sins to the Lord you will obtain pardon for them.
- 9. Stand resolute, fully intent on your prayer. Pay no heed to the concerns and thoughts that might arise the while. They do nothing better than disturb and upset you so as to dissolve the fixity of your purpose.
- 35. Prayer is an ascent of the mind to God.
- 52. The state of prayer can be aptly described as an habitual state of imperturbable calm. It snatches to the heights of intelligible reality the mind which loves wisdom and which is truly spiritualized by the most intense love.
- 113. By true prayer a monk becomes another angel, for he ardently longs to see the face of the Father in heaven.
- 125. A monk is a man who considers himself one with all men because he seems constantly to see himself in every man.
- 153. When you give yourself to prayer, rise above every other joy - then you will find true prayer.⁹

⁹ Ibid., p. 23 - Quote taken from Tr. J. E. Bamberger, Evagrius Ponticus, The Praktikos, Chapters on Prayer (Spencer, MA: Cistercian, 1970) pp. 56-80.

Unfortunately the influence of these "Chapters" and the entire work of Evagrius also produced a negative effect. While Evagrius' Neoplatonic language appeared as a justification of desert spirituality, this contemporary philosophy was certainly not compatible with Christianity itself. Evagrius himself was posthumously condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553). "Was he not as Origen's disciple transforming prophetic monasticism into an intellectualized spirituality? The Neoplatonic concept of the natural divinity of the human mind (nous) led him to see monastic ascetism not as a witness proclaimed "by matter itself to the presence of the Kingdom of God within us, but as a disembodiment of the mind in prayer to give itself over to its 'proper activity'." 10

Evagrius' doctrine of the "prayer of the mind" was an important first step in the development of Orthodox spirituality, but it was not "Orthodox". We may now follow the necessary changes effected in a transformation of the notion of perpetual "prayer of the mind" into the "prayer of Jesus". In the end, it is the person of Christ himself who is the only criterion and only norm of Christian spirituality.

The next important figure, St. Macarius of Egypt, is believed to be one of the first teachers of "pure" prayer, that is, the constant repetition of a short formula whose essential element is the Name of God, "Lord". In the writings of Macarius, called the "Spiritual Homilies" - which do not belong to Macarius himself but to an anonymous author of the late fourth century - there is a most significant shift

10 Meyendorff, p. 23

away from the Platonic dualism of Evagrius and movement toward the Biblical view of man as a whole being. Evagrius thought of man as an intellect imprisoned in matter: the body thus could have no place in the spiritual life, nor could even the Word Incarnate.

Macarian mysticism, however, is entirely based on the Incarnation of the Word.

For him (Macarius) monastic life is not the restoration of the 'activity proper to the intellect', but a deeper fulfillment within us of the grace of baptism; the unceasing prayer of the monk is not aimed at freeing the spirit from the impediment of the flesh; it allows man even here below to enter into eschatological reality, the Kingdom of God, which embraces him, his spirit and his body, in a divine communion. The whole man . . . was created in the image of God and the whole man is called to divine glory.¹¹

For Macarius, therefore, the Christ who has come, who is still to come, and who is now sacramentally present in the church, is the unique center of the monk's spiritual life.

In the following quote from Macarius' "Homilies", we discover the concept of the "heart" as the receptacle of grace and the center of wholeness in man.

Thus it is possible to taste in Christianity the grace of God: Taste and see that the Lord is sweet (Ps. 34:9). This tasting is the dynamic power of the Spirit manifesting itself in full certitude in the heart. The sons of light, ministers of the New Covenant in the Holy Spirit, have nothing to learn from men; they are taught by God. Grace itself engraves the laws of the Spirit on their hearts . . . In fact the heart is master and king of the whole bodily organism, and when grace takes possession of the pasture-land of the heart, it rules over all its members and all its thoughts; for it is in the heart that the intelligence dwells, and there dwell all the soul's thoughts; it finds all its good in the heart. That is why grace penetrates all the members of the body.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., p. 26

¹² Ibid., p. 29

What Macarius accomplished was to incorporate desert spirituality and unceasing prayer into a concept of man in which the whole being enters into grace.

At this juncture let us turn our gaze toward the West for a moment. The distinction between the "prayer of the mind" and "prayer of the heart" is an important one in understanding not only the hesychast tradition of spirituality but plays a significant part in the approach to prayer life in modern, contemplative monasticism of the West.

In the previous chapter on the "desert experience" the Lord said to the Israelites, "I will speak to her (your) heart".¹³ There are, of course, many references in both the Old and New Testaments to this word "heart". "Commune with your own heart, and be still."¹⁴ Clearly what is meant is something much more than the discursive, rational powers of man.

The heart is the Bible word for the spiritual center of man, the place where God dwells most intimately and is to be found. And according to Fr. Herbert Slade, director of a contemplative prayer center located in a rural setting not far from London, the Biblical word "heart" "describes a nexus of spiritual faculties of emotion, insight and will"¹⁵ with which this meeting with God is established. Finding the heart center, says Fr. Slade, is one of the most important discover-

¹³ Hosea 2:14 (Jerusalem Bible).

¹⁴ Psalm 4:4 (KJV).

¹⁵ Herbert Slade, S.S.J.E., Exploration into Contemplative Prayer, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975) p. 112.

ies of every contemplative and is the essential beginning of his spiritual life.

The "heart center" cannot be found through mere intellectual reason or methods. "It is an action involving all the senses and emotions. This leads to deep experiences of grief, hope, fear and joy and comes to fruition in love. It is a discovery controlled by the Lord Himself who takes each and leads him . . . where the secret of His own heart is to be found." ¹⁶

A fuller description of contemplation, meditation, and prayer as understood within contemporary, western monastic forms of spirituality will follow later in this chapter, as well as in the final chapter concerned specifically with the forms of spiritual life as practiced in the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation.

One of the prayers incorporated into the liturgical life of the companions of the OAR is the so-called "Jesus Prayer". In Orthodoxy this simple prayer of the heart is found at the center of all hesychast spirituality. The "Jesus Prayer" was found to be the solution to the dilemma presented to those who desired to take St. Paul at his word, "you must pray 'unceasingly' ". A recent edition of a classic book, The Way of a Pilgrim, describes the life of a 19th century peasant who wandered around Russia as a pilgrim. Wherever he traveled, no matter what his outward situation, with people or alone, the "Jesus Prayer" became a very part of his breathing and imbedded in his heart. The effects of repeating this prayer in his heart were remarkable.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 38.

"The Prayer of my heart gave me such consolation that I felt there was no happier person on earth than I, and I doubted if there could be greater and fuller happiness in the kingdom of Heaven. Not only did I feel this in my own soul, but the whole outside world also seemed to me full of charm and delight. Everything drew me to love and thank God; people, trees, plants, animals. I saw them all as my kinsfolk, I found on all of them the magic of the Name of Jesus. Sometimes I felt as light as though I had no body and was floating happily through the air instead of walking . . . Sometimes I felt as joyful as if I had been made Tsar. And at all such times of happiness, I wished that God would let death come to me quickly, and let me pour out my heart in thankfulness at His feet in the world of spirits." 17

The essence of the Jesus prayer is the invocation of the Name of Jesus. In a work entitled The Ladder of Paradise, one of the most highly ranked spiritual and ascetic doctors in Orthodoxy, "Climacus", provides us with an insight into why the Jesus prayer is found at the center of all hesychast spirituality:

The hesychast is one who says: 'My heart is strengthened' (Ps. 57:8). The hesychast is one who says: 'I sleep, but my heart watches.' Close your cell door to your body, the door of your lips to words, the interior door to spirits.

A poor man who is obedient is better than a distracted hesychast . . . Solitude (hesychia) is worship and uninterrupted service of God. May the name of Jesus be united with your breath; then you will understand the value of solitude. 18

The monk is called to become conscious of the actual presence of Jesus in the interior of his own being, a presence given full and existential reality by the life of the sacraments, without any images. "The luminous vision that may then be experienced will not be a mere symbol or an effect of imagination, but a theophany as true as that on Mount Tabor since it is a manifestation of the same deified Body of

17 The Way of a Pilgrim, (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), p. 105.

18 Meyendorff, p. 36.

Christ." ¹⁹

The expression "luminous vision" is a good descriptive phrase for the end goal of hesychast monastic spirituality. The image of light plays a predominant part, indeed signifies the very inner nature of the attainment of mystical knowledge and experience. From the early patristic period until today Orthodox theologians have expressed and described the spiritual life as a process of "deification", an experience or journey into "divine darkness" (a cloud of unknowing or absence of God, images, symbols, etc.) and penetration into the "divine light". This is the well known "via negativa" or apophatic way of reaching union and oneness with God, the Blessed Trinity.

Another term "Taborite light", is always used by hesychasts to describe their experience of God. For they identify the divine reality that reveals itself to individuals with the light that appeared to Jesus' disciples at His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Such an identification seems to them justified not merely as a symbol but as something very real. Patristic tradition in fact interprets the Gospel story of the Transfiguration as a foretaste of the Second Coming. But Christ is already come and is already a living reality for the Christian in his sacramental life and spiritual experience: "the Kingdom of God is 'within you' " Jesus said. So the Christian is one who through Baptism has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and awaits the completion date of God's Kingdom on the last day. This eschatology of "fulfillment" is an essential theme of New Testament spirituality.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

In the next chapter the theology of Orthodox spirituality will be spelled out in greater detail. Because St. Gregory Palamas was the one who created a dogmatic synthesis of theology and spirituality within the hesychast tradition, let us look now at a portion of his writings:

This supra-rational knowledge, he wrote, is the common possession of all those who have believed in Christ . . . Christ will come in the glory of the Father and . . . in that glory 'the just shall shine as the sun' (Matt. 13:43); they will be light and they will see light, a blessed and sacred vision, that is the portion of the purified heart alone. Today this light shines out in part, a pledge given those who by impassibility have left behind all that is forbidden, and by pure and immaterial prayer have passed beyond all that is pure. But on that day the splendor of this light will deify 'the sons of the resurrection' (Luke 20:36) who will rejoice in eternity and glory in communion with the One who has given our nature divine glory and radiance. ²⁰

In another passage Palamas wrote of the difference between the apostles who went up Mount Tabor with Jesus and the Christians of today. Peter, James and John saw the light "exteriorly", as an object appearing to their bodily eyes, while Christians now can contemplate the light of the risen Lord interiorly, within their own hearts. To become ever more aware of and more fully realize the Christ-presence is the special goal sought by the monks of the East, and also in our Christian West.

To summarize our pilgrimage into the depths of monastic spirituality thus far, we began in Egypt with Moses who was led by God into the wilderness of the desert in order to confront reality. He, too, was led up to the mountain top where he encountered Yahweh himself in all of His awesome mystery and revelation of Himself. We then looked at the nature of the "desert experience" of Elijah, Hosea, and John the Baptist,

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 116, 7.

all men who heard God speak to them, and through them gave prophetic witness to the reality and action of God's presence in history.

We saw how Christ himself incarnated into his existence and very being the desert experience through His essential relationship with God as "abba", Father. Jesus was and is the man "from the Other". In hesychast spirituality Christ himself, as experienced sacramentally and directly in the human heart - the whole man - is not only the goal of the monk's vocation but the means to fulfillment. Jesus said "I am the Way the Truth and the Life". ²¹

Let us complete our pilgrimage to the contemporary perimeters of monasticism by extracting some of the gold offered to us through the insights of present-day contemplative personalities. There does exist a basic unity and togetherness in the two viewpoints of Eastern and Western monasticism. Of course outward forms vary, as they do within any single culture. Yet a striking "unity in diversity" is apparent among the spiritual ideals of every monastic vocation.

The end goal common to both traditions is the same: the vision of and union with the Triune God. A Christian's goal is not happiness (a secular concern) but holiness. "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (I Peter 1:16) In the West the term "contemplation" has come into predominant use to describe one important facet of monastic spirituality. In the Orthodox East "contemplation" is also used, although "pure prayer", "deification", and the "Jesus Prayer" are probably more common.

The description of contemplation found in Cross's "Oxford

²¹ John 14:6 (RSV).

Dictionary of the Christian Church" is as follows:

As used by modern religious writers contemplation describes non-discursive mental prayer as distinguished from meditation. In so far as this stage of prayer is held to be reached by the normal development of the natural faculties it is termed "acquired contemplation" (as also "the prayer of simplicity"); but when considered as the fruit of supernatural grace, directly acting on the soul, it is known as "infused contemplation". Mystical writers such as St. Theresa of Avila distinguished between several forms of mystic contemplation.

From our study of hesychast spirituality, it is clear that the monks of this calibre are seeking "infused contemplation". On the other hand, I believe both of these types of contemplation are interrelated and therefore, are not limited to the practice of monks and nuns. Fr. McNamara, Fr. Slade, and Thomas Merton agree that contemplation is the privilege, right, and responsibility of every Christian.

The word contemplation comes from the Latin word contemplari which describes the acts of the Roman augurs when they looked for God's will within a sacred enclosure called the templum. It is related to the Greek word theoria which means to look towards God and to the Sanskrit word samadhi which describes an act of concentrated thought. As mentioned earlier, McNamara calls contemplation "a long, loving, leisurely look at the living God".

In the first chapter it was stated that the desert was conducive to contemplation because of its simplicity, its silence, and its being a place of solitude. In this kind of environment the individual may go through the "desert experience" as previously delineated. In this way I pictured monastic spirituality as a particular and profound transformation which may occur to those who seek this experience.

According to McNamara, contemplation and prayer are very natural

things to us humans, what we were created to do, and to be, these "activities" are what make us fully human, fully alive, able to realize all of our potential. I think he sums this up well:

Meditating liberates us from the compulsive drive of our desires; it evokes the deepest and most real dimensions of the authentic self; it re-collects the scattered forces of our fragmented lives so that we can discover the basic rhythm of human existence. In meditation, properly understood and perseveringly practiced, the whole man is actualized and the center of his being is awakened. The right thoughts, words, and deeds come to man on condition that he is awakened.

Meditation collects, unifies, and integrates a human being. Prayer raises the mind and heart to God. What's the use of coming into possession of myself, gaining mastery of my human instrument, if I cannot then put my beautiful 'I' into relationship with the 'Thou' of God? ²²

What he is saying was expressed centuries ago by St. Irenaeus of Lyons: "The Glory of God is a human person fully alive and consists in beholding God."

The way par excellence, therefore, to know and experience the "Thou" of God is for ourselves to become more intuitive, our lives more simplified, and our personalities more integrated. The mystics are good examples of such powers of perception and presence. For most of us supernatural life is a seed buried in the subconscious. But as we become less fragmented and dispersed, more single-minded and recollected, God comes closer to holding the central position in our lives, and we become more conscious of His life within ours.

This way to "perfection" (doing what we were created to do) is only entered into when we develop these powers within under the direc-

²² William McNamara, OCD, The Human Adventure: Contemplation for Everyman, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) pp. 170, 1.

tion of the Holy Spirit. And while it is God himself who always takes the first step towards us, we are reminded by St. Paul that it is our responsibility as God's sons and daughters "to work out your own (our) salvation with fear and trembling".²³ Therefore we are directly called to practice contemplation, prayer and meditation, and to do good works, in order to be glorified and in the whole process glorify our Creator.

The "spiritual" life could aptly be described as an on-going journey or pilgrimage toward reality - the reality of creation, our own ground of being and "human habitation", and the Absolute Reality of God. Ascetism, the science of prayer, is our tool for removing all stumbling blocks that we meet along the pathway that come between God and ourselves. Our greatest stumbling blocks are within, not without. The biggest block is always our own selves. This is why monastic theology and spirituality emphasize the necessity of self-denial, indeed death to self so that Christ may take our place as Lord: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me".²⁴

The following prayer from "Hymn of the Universe" by Teilhard de Chardin expresses the essence of all prayer: "O Lord, lock me up, enfold me in the deepest depths of your heart; and then, holding me there burn me, kindle me, set me ablaze and lift me aloft until I become utterly what you would have me be, through the cleansing death of self. Amen." ²⁵

²³ Philippians 2:12 (RSV).

²⁴ Galatians 2:20 (RSV).

²⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) p. 32.

As quoted earlier, for Macarius the monastic life is a deep fulfillment within us of the grace of Baptism. Christ Himself is the unique center and criterion of the monk's spiritual life. Baptism, as portrayed in the New Testament, implies all the rich symbolism and meaning of the Paschal Mystery itself: the dying and rising with Christ. The whole of the New Testament is quite clear on this one essential requirement to receive salvation - a metanoia experience made possible only through the free gift of God's grace active in the life of the believer. And in the Anglican as well as Orthodox understanding of St. Paul's theological anthropology, the initial gift of grace, the life of the Holy Spirit, is not only received in Baptism but must then be appropriated, deepened, increased, and fully realized (or released) in the whole of the individual person's life. To fully realize our grace of Baptism is to become fully united with Christ, to attain to that union and oneness with God of which He himself offered prayer to the Father on our behalf. ²⁶

To attempt to treat adequately the subject of monastic or contemplative spirituality would entail a more in-depth study and explication of the arts of prayer, meditation techniques, and the principles of contemplation. There are many excellent contemporary books and articles in these areas, such as the works by Fr. Herbert Slade, Fr. William McNamara, and Thomas Merton, which I have already cited. My purpose, here, has been to introduce and describe the essential characteristics and the particular perspective of a genuine Christian spiri-

²⁶ See St. John 17.

tuality found, preserved, and perpetually renewed in each new age within the religious vocation called 'monastic'.

Ours is an age of a competitive market among forms of spirituality as well as secular ideologies. The need for discernment and spiritual direction are indispensable requirements today as in the time of St. Paul. There is authentic Christian spirituality, and there is a pseudo-Christian spiritualism. And the way to tell the difference is by the fruits. Spiritualism is a flight from history and liturgy, a premature exit into an esoteric realm of heavenly glory; truly Christian spirituality is faith or trust going the way of Christ in history, i.e., through the extension of His Incarnation, the Church.

Spiritualism says the Kingdom is all here; its just a matter of being "turned on", or turning inward, to see subjectively the face of the Lord shining in the realm of glory.

St. Paul offers us a different perspective. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Christian is still very much caught up in the struggle of sharing the pain of God in the world through the sufferings of Christ. We are a people waiting for the future to bring the final victory of the Lord and the redemption of our bodies. Christ already reigns in the present, but we are to "Hope against hope" and look forward in anticipation to the new heaven and the new earth, the final defeat of all evil powers that still prey upon believers and unbelievers.

As Christians, our perspective toward a genuine or authentic spirituality is to celebrate hope in the present, as Dean Hough has suggested.²⁷ This means that the Spirit now makes really present

²⁷ *Supra*, p. 10.

things that will be more fully realized in the future. The grace given in Baptism is at work in us now, as are all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We receive and enjoy the fruits of the Spirit in this our earthly pilgrimage.

We may summarize by saying that monastic spirituality is a form of concrete mysticism (knowing God and making Him known), it is incarnational in its essence, and sacramental in practice as well as in theological perspective. In Hesychastic spirituality and the contemplative prayer of the Western monastic life spiritual existence is identified with the whole of human existence. To become "holy" is to develop one's full human capacities and powers, to be "fully alive". It is to become incorporated into Christ himself through the process of 'deification' (hesychasm) or 'transfiguration' as the disciples Peter, James and John entered the cloud and there "saw" the transfigured Christ. As we have seen, we too are to be transformed and recreated, through the self-simplification of heart and will, the self-emptying and being stripped of all externals which occurs in our own "desert experience".

An authentic spirituality is "sacramental" in the sense that the Spirit as eschatological experience is known in our bodies. The dualism of Evagrius' Neoplatonic Metaphysics is neither biblical nor, as we saw earlier, in line with genuine Orthodox spirituality. St. Paul says, "The body is . . . for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." ²⁸ The body is beautiful; but when it is a spiritual body, it is more

²⁸ I Corinthians 3:16 (RSV).

beautiful still. A spiritual body is this: a body in which the eschatological future of God is already taking up residence. "The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." There is no true spirituality that leaves the body behind.

The key referent of a Christian spirituality that takes the incarnation seriously is its attitude toward the body. The body, not something else, is the battle field of the two opposing power systems, each struggling to take hold of a person's life by controlling the body.

Finally, Christian spirituality is not the ascent of the soul out of our bodies; it is openness to the descent of the Spirit into our bodies. There is an infinite variety of gifts, and it would be presumptuous on our part to limit a specific number (seven, or nine, or fourteen . . .) gifts. The most important gifts or charismata are faith (the spirituality of the past present), hope (the spirituality of the future present), and the greatest of them all, love (the past and the future meeting in Christ's eternal NOW).

Chapter 4

THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

It was not on tales artfully spun that we relied when we told you of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming; we saw him with our own eyes in majesty, when at the hands of God the Father he was invested with honour and glory, and there came to him from the sublime Presence a voice which said: 'This is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favour rests.' This voice from heaven we ourselves heard; when it came, we were with him on the sacred mountain.¹

The Transfiguration was not an isolated mystical experience which had no effect on the practical thinking of those who shared it. It was one of the controlling influences of the earliest Christian theology and showed how powerfully contemplative experience could effect the thinking of the Church. The finest theology has been the work of contemplatives who have written of insight experiences against the received traditions of the Church.

When I initiated my own reflective and meditative processes of mind and heart, in preparation for composing this chapter, it occurred to me how much of my theological thinking and assumptions are shaped by the insights and reflections of a variety of theologians and philosophers. All of these have been fed into my own "computer" and have clearly altered my perceptions over the years. It then came to me that what I can rightfully claim as my own personal theological viewpoint has developed in large measure out of an underlying experience best described as "contemplative". In my own experience I justify this contemplative insight as Christian on the grounds that it has grown out of, is

¹ 2 Peter 1:16-18 (NEB)

rooted in, and is seen or viewed in the light and common experience of a particular tradition known as the Judeo-Christian tradition. Tradition signifies so much more than fixed doctrines handed down from antiquity. In its best and accurate sense tradition is participation in a living truth in the now, as well as in the future. For theology this means the old "eternal verities", revealed in the Old and New Testaments received first by the Apostles, are made forever new and fresh in each new epoch.

Fr. William McNamara, one of the leading authorities in our time on the contemplative life, states that, "Contemplative insight is the foundation and source of Christian doctrine. The doctrine perpetuates the insight and saves the new Christian from beginning from scratch. This was affirmed by the English mystic Augustine Baker when he wrote in Holy Wisdom:

The first knowledge of our mysteries of Christian religion came in and by contemplations . . . to which God called the apostles, doctors and other principal members and beginners of the Church and to them hath communicated and imparted the same to other Christians who took it by tradition from those contemplators who saw and felt the truth of those mysteries. ²

As contemporary Christians, we too are those who have seen and felt the truth of the holy mysteries. In our time, however, Bernard Lonergan has pointed to the new growth of "a pluralism of theologies" and he sees in this a symptom of the way theology will advance in the future. He writes: "Such a pluralism or multiplicity is of fundamental importance, both for the understanding of the development of reli-

² William McNamara, The Human Adventure: Contemplation for Everyone (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), pl. 98, citing Augustine Baker, Holy Wisdom (London: Burns & Oates, 1933).

gious traditions, and for an understanding of the impasse that may result from such development." ³

Lonergan in this statement raises for us, and for the process of theological reflection and formulation, some very pertinent questions. In the context of a variety of theologies on the market, how does one distinguish between true and false doctrine? What criteria are needed in order to judge the difference between the two? To what authority does the theologian appeal? Scripture, Tradition, reason, transcendent revelation, structures of human existence, the world and cosmos? These are all valid questions which confront us today more dramatically than ever before.

In this chapter I wish to deal with these questions as they relate to the mystical theology of Eastern Orthodoxy. Just as there are close points of contact and basic similarities between contemporary contemplative prayer, as understood and practiced by western monastic communities, and the pure prayer of hesychastic spirituality of eastern monasticism, so too we find important parallels among the two representative theological viewpoints of these two traditions. That such parallels exist is not surprising for, as stated at the beginning of the previous chapter (p. 32), the theological existentialism and hesychast spirituality of the Orthodox Church are two necessary, complementary aspects of the one and the same truth. Thus, as in the previous chapter, I will make reference to and draw upon the wisdom and insights of both

³ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., Method in Theology (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), pp. 271-2.

eastern and western monasticism in order to elucidate the essential principles and particular perspective of mystical theology.

Traditionally western monasticism has adopted what is called mystical or apophatic theology in contrast to the more positivistic and rational methodology of philosophical theology. In an age when interest in mysticism in general is on the rise, it serves us well to examine more deeply what monastic theology has attempted to tell us all along.

In the first place, mystical theology is notoriously skeptical of fixed definitions of God and doctrinal statements of faith tied permanently to any one or combinations of two or more of philosophical systems of thought. Of course to do theology is by definition to attempt a systematic way of gathering and connecting the experiential data of Christian existence. Somebody has to do it! And surely one of our greatest needs in our modern era is to present a way of looking at the facts of life and religious experience in terms acceptable to the modern mind. Herein lies the theologian's perennial challenge. The danger it seems to me, is to present a too narrow vision of reality that neglects the whole picture, or else we are content to live with a watered down version of theological doctrine that may find popular appeal in its secular wrapping but quickly loses its power to affect us deeply as it stands the test of time.

In this regard, Thomas Merton made the observation that "the hope of transcendent and final truth is something that is definitely not dead or dying in the modern world. On the contrary, we see on all sides evidences of an almost desperate need for spiritual depth and authentic hope. It is this very need which results in so much justified

contempt for superficiality in popular religion." ⁴

With the apparent defeat of metaphysics and the removal of the wind behind the sails of myth and the rich symbolism contained in much of Holy Scripture, a new crop of secular theologies have arisen to fill the void. It is a deep prejudice in our culture that non-material things do not exist, that angels are the figment of an oriental mind, that non scientific statements cannot be true, and that what is most visible, measurable and controllable has the highest value. The grave danger, as mentioned earlier, is the potential threat of an increasing loss of any genuine spirituality. As Merton perceived, the desperate need in our day is a basis for authentic hope. As the scientific mind clears the field of symbols of the Christian future, a vacuum is created. The cry for an authentic theology of hope has gone out.

Before describing the essential principles of mystical theology, the content of the following interesting dream I had on February 11, 1972, clearly revealed to me a part of my own subconscious awareness of a theological perspective. As I recorded it at the time, I was sitting listening to a monk explain his views of existence and experience of God. A theologian sitting on my left inquired, "could you give me the 'framework' for your answer?" Sitting next to me on my right in the dream was Frere Roger Schutz, Prior of a Protestant and ecumenical monastic community located at Taizé, France. (I heard him speak once several years ago, not on this subject.) He leaned over, my eyes meeting his, and with a knowing smile he said, "that is the incorrect way

⁴ Thomas Merton, Contemplation in a World of Action (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 210.

of understanding God; he (the theologian) is looking in the wrong place - it isn't the 'framework' but the immediate experience itself".

By relating this dream I am not suggesting that the content of one's dreams ought to be sought in order to discover sound theology. Clearly this particular dream, however, had real significance to me. My waking, rational and intuitive powers confirm that what Frere Schutz had to say (as my subconscious put words in his mouth) is a keynote principle of mystical theology.

Simply stated, this keynote or foundation principle is that all true theology is grounded in experience. It is never based on "tales artfully spun" but on evidence seen with the eyes or experienced in the souls of human persons. We already mentioned St. Peter's reference to his encounter with the transfigured Christ. St. John makes the same claim when he writes: "It was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell".⁵ Both Peter and John based their teaching on theological experience. In doing so they are harmony with a strong movement in present-day theology which insists that the source of sound theology must be experience and so form a school of empirical theology. But this means that there must be a way to such experience which has to be taken before there can be valid theology about it. In finding such a way contemplative prayer and hesychast mysticism provide some essential insights and enlightenment.

Fr. Herbert Slade, S.S.J.E., makes reference to the fact that

⁵ I John 1:1 (NEB)

sound religious insight comes from an objective experience arising from the senses, from the interaction of reason on that experience and from the interpretative help of sound tradition. He suggests St. Peter applied these principles to the Transfiguration and St. John to the incarnation. It was something they both experienced with all the senses and then worked out through the use of sound reasoning upon it. This approach was done against the background of their Old Testament traditions. And the result was that fundamental theological insight that the person they had experienced in this way was the beloved Son of God.

The following is a good summary of Fr. Slade's understanding of the way of theologizing:

Sound reasoning leads to sound theology but this reasoning is something more than what is required in scientific thought, although this is by no means to be despised. It is an intercourse between the human mind and the divine Word, speaking in the heart and recognised in a process of reflective thought. The movement of the mind will certainly be needed to do this, but it will be the mind under the trained control of the Holy Spirit, the mind illuminated by grace. Skill in this is the result of some kind of meditative thinking and that comes from mental discipline, the recognition of mental hindrances and a planned discipline for reducing them. Again this requires that the theologian should be more than a thinker. He must above all be a man of prayer.⁶

Fr. Slade goes on to remind us that the early Church theologians were in no hurry to write anything until it had been tested and fully experienced. Jesus did not command his disciples never to tell the vision they had seen at the Transfiguration to any person. What he did was to tell them to delay the telling until they were more mature and the time was right. After they had shared in the passion and

⁶ Herbert Slade, Exploration into Contemplative Prayer (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 154.

resurrection they would then be ready to put into words what they had seen.

This, then, is the first principle in the formulation of mystical theology. "It is the result of an experience assimilated over a long time. Like poetry, good theology is emotion recollected in tranquillity. This is above all true of the theology of the contemplative. He must make it part of himself first. The truth has first to be heard, read, marked and inwardly digested before it can be shared with others." ⁷

We may now answer our original question as to the authority employed by the theologian to justify his or her particular viewpoint, doctrine, etc. In Anglicanism, represented by Fr. Herbert Slade, the threefold elements of Scripture, Tradition, and reason as the balance between the two, have always been upheld as the authoritative means to the discovery of truth. Added to these are all the faculties of human nature - the heart, the emotions, and all the physical senses. The data of Revelation, the so-called mysteries of the Christian faith, are received through empirical, human experience. And more important than the rational, discursive powers of reasoning skill, according to Fr. Slade, are the quality of prayer life and the meditative abilities of the theologian. That theology and spirituality are really two sides of the same coin is most visibly apparent in the synthesis firmly established by St. Gregory Palamas, theologian and master of orthodox mysticism.

⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

Palamas was born in 1296; his parents were of noble birth. He grew up at the court of Emperor Andronicus II Paleologus. Andronicus was a patron of writers and scholars, an intellectual, and the most religious of the late Byzantine rulers. Until Gregory was about twenty years old, he was engaged in secular studies, the basic classical trivium and quadrivium, which gave him a considerable knowledge of Aristotle.

About 1316, Gregory suddenly decided to follow the monastic vocation, inspired by contact with eminent monks in Constantinople. In vain the emperor promised him a brilliant career, but he decided to leave the world. For twenty years he led a monastic life on the "Holy Mountain" - Mount Athos in Greece. In the fourteenth century, Athos was the center of all orthodox monasticism. It was also an intellectual center. The years spent there by Palamas were not only a spiritual training for him but also an opportunity to gain very wide knowledge of patristic literature. The manner of life that Palamas followed on Mount Athos was a semi-communal form of life; a few monks would group around a spiritual master, practising asceticism and prayer together, going on Saturdays and Sundays to the monastic community in order to participate in the liturgy and receive the sacraments. Palamas maintained a balance between his personal spiritual life and community prayer, which hesychasm achieved in the fourteenth century, and this in large part determined his theological thought.

Turning now to a summary-description of the essential principles of the theology of hesychasm, we will see how Palamas integrates the mystical tradition with Christian thought that is based on the Scriptures and on a vast knowledge of the early Church Fathers. We will

discover that Palamas developed a thoroughly Christocentric anthropology by affirming the exclusively Christocentric and sacramental foundations of deification and the absolutely unattainable nature of the divine essence. These two aspects of Christian thought are the basic axioms of Greek patristics. Palamas' only claim to originality lies in the clarity with which he states and solves the problem.

We will want to see how Palamas treats the issue of transcendence and immanence, how he relates a realistic doctrine of supernatural knowledge to his teaching of a personal existentialism. Finally, the eschatological perspective of Palamite thought must be realized in order to understand his theology and the images he uses to express it.

The first major work composed by Palamas was his Triads for the Defense of the Holy Hesychasts.⁸ The following passage reveals very clearly the anthropological and theological structure into which Palamas inserted hesychast spirituality:

In his incomparable love for men, the Son of God did not merely unite his divine Hypostasis to our nature, clothing himself with a living body and an intelligent soul, 'to appear on earth and live with men' (Baruch 3:38), but O incomparable and magnificent miracle! he unites himself also to human hypostases, joining himself to each of the faithful by communion in his holy Body. For he becomes one body with us (Eph. 3:6) making us a temple of the whole Godhead - for in the very Body of Christ 'the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells corporeally' (Co. 3:9). How then would he not illuminate those who share worthily in the divine radiance of his Body within us, shining upon their soul as he once shone on the bodies of the apostles on Tabor? For as this Body, the source of the light of grace, was at that time not yet united to our body, it shone exteriorly on those who came near it worthily, transmitting light to the soul through the eyes of sense. But today, since it is united to us and dwells within us, it illumines the soul interiorly.⁹

⁸ Gregory Palamas, Triads, 14th c. (Vatican Greek 1711).

⁹ John Meyendorff, St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 112.

In this passage we can begin to see how Palamas developed his personal existentialism based upon a very Pauline anthropology.

Since the Incarnation, our bodies have become "temples of the Holy Spirit within" ¹⁰ it is there within our own bodies that we must seek the Spirit. Here, also, is the image of light, the "Taborite light" discussed in the previous chapter, so often used to describe the spiritual experience within hesychast mysticism.

According to John Meyendorff, Palamas "rediscovered the true meaning of New Testament terms such as spirit (pneuma), soul (psyche), body (soma), and flesh (sarx), which do not oppose spirit to matter but the supernatural to the created world. The human spirit is, in fact, as radically 'different' from God as is the body, and God in granting his grace saves the whole man, his body and his soul". ¹¹

An issue of particular importance in our scientific era is that of the nature of transcendence and immanence in theological language. It is surely unpopular now to speak of a supernatural order of reality which exists independently of or transcends all empirical reality. For Palamas this issue took on the problem of attempting to reconcile two apparently contradictory facts, both integral to patristic tradition:

(1) The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is a total revelation that establishes an intimacy and union between God and man, expressed by St. Paul in the image of one Body, that gives man vision of God face to face. (2) God is by nature unknowable.

¹⁰ I Corinthians 6:19 (RSV).

¹¹ Meyendorff, p. 114.

To begin with, Palamas partially solves this dilemma of the theologian by affirming the divine immanence in history and man. God does not reveal Himself to the world only through creatures but directly in Jesus Christ.

We have all, all of us, known the Son by the Father's voice speaking to us from on high (Matt. 3:16-17) and the Holy Spirit himself, who is unutterable light, has shown us that this is indeed the well-beloved of the Father; the Son himself has manifested to us the name of his Father and as he ascended again into heaven promised to send us the Holy Spirit to abide with us forever (John 14:16); the Holy Spirit himself has come down to us and abides with us, teaching us all truth (John 14:13). How then could it be true that we know God only through creatures? Is it impossible for one who does not know marriage by personal experience to understand the intimate union of God with the Church, since he has no analogy of his own experience to appeal to? Will you then advise everyone to renounce virginity in order to achieve the knowledge of God of which you speak? But Paul refutes you; he, through unmarried, was the first to proclaim: "This is a great mystery, but I speak of Christ and the Church."

God reveals himself "face to face, and not in enigmas" (Num. 12-8); he unites himself to those who are worthy as to his own members, as soul is united to body; he unites himself coming to dwell in his wholeness in the whole of their being, so that they in turn may dwell in him; through the Son, the Spirit is poured out abundantly upon us, and yet it is not, because of that, a created spirit.¹²

In Palamite terminology, as in that of the Greek Fathers, God is essentially apart from other beings by His uncreated nature. He is essentially transcendent to every creature; even when He manifests Himself, He remains unknowable in His essence, for a revelation of the divine essence would bring God down to the level of creatures and make man a "God by nature". But if God is essentially distinct from all creatures, including man, and is unknowable, how can He be known and experienced in the heart, mind, body, and soul of man?

¹² Ibid., pp. 112-20.

The answer is found in the fact that as human creatures we are granted the power to see God through the gift of the Holy Spirit taking up residence in us. We possess no faculty of our own capable of seeing and experiencing the living God, so if such vision exists, it must be because in His omnipotence God Himself has united Himself to us, communicating to us the knowledge He has of Himself.

Since this power has no other means of acting, having gone beyond all other beings, it becomes wholly light in itself and like that which it sees; it is united without admixture, being light (itself), and seeing light through light. If it looks at itself, it sees light; if it looks at the object of its vision, it again sees light, and if it looks at the means by which it sees, again it sees light. That is what union means; all is so one, that he who sees can make no distinction either of the means or the end or the object; he is conscious only of being light and seeing light distinct from all that is created. ¹³

Knowledge of God, then, according to Palamas, is not a knowledge that necessarily demands that the knowing subject be exterior to the object known, but a union in uncreated light. Such passages as just quoted express the Scriptural concept that, in Christ, man is given the power to become Spirit.¹⁴ By participation in God Himself, in His uncreated grace, man himself becomes God. As St. Paul says, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me". ¹⁵

Herein lies the valuable contribution, I believe, of mystical theology. What has appeared in rationalistic thought and in many theological circles as an insoluble and absurd dilemma becomes in the existential and mystical theology of Palamas a satisfying statement of the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ John 3:6.

¹⁵ Galatians 2:20 (RSV).

divine Mystery. God is at the same time the supreme Mystery of the universe and all existence, remaining transcendent in His distinctness as the uncreated Triune God; but He is also the Living God who does actually desire to reveal Himself fully to man in His Son and to share with man His own uncreated existence. God freely chooses to participate in, to enter into our very own existence as subject of action rather than as an object of knowledge.

We are now in a position to ask, "What is the main thrust and aim of the mystical theology at the heart of monastic life and existence? And what does this theological perspective and vision of reality have to say to our modern world and to the Church universal?"

To our modern, secularized way of thinking the word "mystical" suggests states of highly esoteric, other worldly speculations of a pre-scientific mentality born of ignorance and wrapped in obscurity. But where is the wisdom of the Gospel to be found? St. Paul speaks about the true wisdom and the false to a confused congregation of believers in Corinth. Paul quotes from Is. 29:14, Ps. 33:10 and Is. 33:18, "As scripture says: 'I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing all the learning of the learned. Where are the philosophers now? Where are the scribes?' Where are any of our thinkers today? Do you see now how God has shown up the foolishness of human wisdom? If it was God's wisdom that human wisdom should not know God, it was because God wanted to save those who have faith through the foolishness of the message that we preach . . . for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom . . ." ¹⁶

¹⁶ I Cor. 1:19-21, 25 (Jerusalem Bible).

Toward the end of the previous chapter on "monastic spirituality" (p.52), I asserted that the key referent of a Christian spirituality that takes the incarnation seriously is the body, the whole man. In this way I have tried to show that monastic spirituality is a form of concrete (grounded in empirical, existential experience) mysticism (knowing God and making Him known). So clearly there is nothing esoteric about mysticism seen from its true perspective. The purposes of theology are to make manifest, to seek clarity of expression of what ultimately must remain mystery and obscure in this world. Now we are looking through a glass darkly. This will be true until the Parousia; then the whole show will be over and we can go backstage to view the hidden things as well as meet the Director personally!

This is the marvelous eschatological perspective of mystical theology and contemplative spirituality. We have not yet seen all there is to see. In the meantime, we are already living in the end times; we have been for nearly two-thousand years. Through baptismal initiation we have received a new life, or rather a new life of the Spirit has been begun in us. And as Origen taught the third century Christians, we too have a real part to play and responsibility for our own personal sanctification and the sanctification of all of life on this planet earth, our fragile island home.

As stated in the previous chapter, to become holy is to develop one's full human capacities and powers, to be fully alive. It is to become incorporated into Christ himself through the process of "deification" (hesychasm) or "transfiguration" as the disciples Peter, James and John entered the cloud and there "saw" the transfigured Christ. I

also said that from the early patristic period until today Orthodox theologians have expressed and described the spiritual life as a process of "deification". In this chapter I have outlined the Christocentric and sacramental foundations of deification as understood from the writing of St. Gregory Palamas. In this way I have tried to show how monastic spirituality is indeed a form of concrete, existential mysticism. I will now summarize the main points contained in these last two chapters in order to clarify the interrelatedness of the particular form of spirituality, known as "deification", presented in this thesis, and the theological setting provided for this mode of spirituality.

What is meant by "deification" in the terms of mystical theology? It is summed up in the well known saying of St. Irenaeus, "The Glory of God is man fully alive". So, we can say that the process of man becoming fully alive, developing his full potential of what he was created to be and to do, according to God's plan, is what deification is all about. To support this statement and unpack its meaning, I will refer to several contemporary theologians representing the viewpoint of mystical theology.

The way of deification, theosis, is the way of union with God. Unlike gnosticism, in which knowledge for its own sake constitutes the aim of the gnostic, Christian theology according to the Greek Fathers is always in the last resort a means: a unity of knowledge subserving an end which transcends all knowledge. This end is deification.

In his book entitled: The Mystical Theology of the Eastern

Church,¹⁷ Vladimir Lossky demonstrates how the development of the dogmatic controversies within the church down the centuries appear as dominated by the constant preoccupation which the Church has had to safeguard, at each moment of her history, for all Christians, the possibility of attaining to the fullness of the mystical union.

So the Church struggled against the gnostics in defence of this same idea of deification as the universal end: 'God became man that men might become gods'. She affirmed, against the Arians, the dogma of the consubstantial Trinity; for it is the Word, the Logos, who opens to us the way to union with the Godhead; and if the incarnate Word has not the same substance with the Father, if he be not truly God, our deification is impossible. The Church condemned the Nestorians that she might overthrow the middle wall of partition, whereby, in the person of the Christ himself, they would have separated God from man. She rose up against the Apollinarians and Monophysites to show that, since the fullness of true human nature has been assumed by the Word, it is our whole humanity that must enter into union with God. She warred with the Monothelites because, apart from the union of the two wills, divine and human, there could be no attaining to deification - 'God created man by his will alone, but He cannot save him without the co-operation of the human will.' The Church emerged triumphant from the iconoclastic controversy, affirming the possibility of the expression through a material medium of the divine realities - symbol and pledge of our sanctification. The main preoccupation, the issue at stake, in the questions which successively arise respecting the Holy Spirit, grace and the Church herself - this last the dogmatic question of our own time - is always the possibility, the manner, or the means of our union with God.¹⁸

Here Lossky shows that the theological doctrines which have been formulated in the course of these struggles can be treated in direct relation to the vital end - that of union with God. I will now give such a treatment of Orthodox doctrine, thereby explicating the integration of deification within the theological setting more precisely.

This setting, as we have seen in St. Gregory Palamas, is essentially a synthesis of Christological and anthropological doctrines.

¹⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge, Eng: Clarke, 1957).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Let us see, therefore, how these doctrinal viewpoints are integrated in order to understand the process of deification.

According to an early church Father, St. Maximus, the incarnation of Jesus Christ and deification correspond to one another; they mutually imply each other. God descends to the world and becomes man, and man is raised towards divine fullness and becomes god, because this union of two natures, the divine and the human, has been determined in the eternal counsel of God, and because it is the final end for which the world has been created out of nothing.¹⁹ The way of deification has been echoed by theologians down the ages beginning with the words of Ireneus and Athanasius, "God became man in order that man might become god".²⁰ A full treatment of the doctrine of the incarnation and the work of Christ is beyond the scope of this thesis, however some essential points need to be spelled out in order to offer a justification for our consideration of Orthodox theology today.

Lossky refers to the argument 'what is not assumed, cannot be deified' to which the Fathers continually return. He goes on to elucidate the relationship between Christ's nature and our human nature:

What is deified in Christ is His human nature assumed in its fullness by the divine person. What must be deified in us in our entire nature, belonging to our person which must enter into union with God, and become a person created in two natures: a human nature which is deified, and a nature or, rather, divine energy, that deifies. The work accomplished by Christ is related to our nature, it is no longer separated from Christ by our fault. It is a new body, pure from all taint of sin, free from all external necessity, separated from our iniquity and from every alien will by the precious Blood of Christ. It is the pure and incorruptible

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

realm of the Church where one attains union with God; it is also our nature in so far as it is incorporated in the Church, and is part of the Body of Christ, in which we were made an integral part through Baptism. ²¹

To grasp what Lossky means by saying that what must be deified in us is our entire nature, and become a person created in two natures, further clarification of a description of human nature is necessary.

The Greek fathers sometimes describe human nature as threefold: consisting of spirit, soul and body, sometimes as the union of soul and body. The difference in effect is one of terminology. The important fact agreed upon among Orthodox theologians is that man was created for deification, moving towards union with God. The spirit (*nous*, *pneuma*), the highest part of the human creature, is that contemplative faculty by which man is able to seek God.

The most personal part of man, the principle of his conscience and of his freedom, the spirit (*nous*) in human nature corresponds most nearly to the person; it might be said that it is the seat of the person, of the human hypo-spirit, soul and body. This is why the Greek Fathers are often ready to identify the *nous* with the image of God in man. Man must live according to the spirit; the whole human complex must become 'spiritual', must acquire the 'likeness'. It is in fact the spirit which becomes united with baptismal grace, and through which grace enters into the heart, the centre of that total human nature which is to be deified. 'The uniting of the spirit with the heart', 'the descent of the spirit into the heart', 'the guarding of the heart by the spirit' - these expressions constantly recur in the ascetic writings of the Eastern Church. Without the heart, which is the centre of all activity, the spirit is powerless. Without the spirit, the heart remains blind, destitute of direction. ²²

This anthropological analysis by Lossky is an excellent amplification of the view of St. Macarius quoted earlier (p. 39).

²¹ Ibid., p. 155.

²² Ibid., p. 201.

We are now ready to see more clearly the nature of the process of deification as it takes place in human existence. That which must be deified in us is our created nature, especially the human will which is responsible for the introduction of evil, the power of sin and death. Man is given free will. He can choose to cooperate with God's will, which is to cooperate with that part of his nature created in the image of likeness of God, or he can choose to go against this controlling spiritual aspect of his nature and turn his back on God. Lossky offers the following interpretation:

The spirit must find its sustenance in God, must live from God; the soul must feed on the spirit; the body must live on the soul - such was the original ordering of our immortal nature. But turning back from God, the spirit, instead of providing food for the soul, begins to live at the expense of the soul, feeding itself on its substance (what we usually call 'spiritual values'); the soul in turn begins to live with the life of the body, and this is the origin of the passions; finally, the body is forced to seek its nourishment outside, in inanimate matter, and in the end comes on death. The human complex finally disintegrates. ²³

There are, therefore, two ways open before man: the way of the Spirit, which leads to life, and the way of the world, which leads ultimately to death. The former is the way of union with God, deification, and it can only be followed by a combination of the presence of grace on God's part and complete surrender of will on our part. In this fashion we can become "partakers of the divine nature". ²⁴

To arrive at this end the concurrence of two wills is necessary; on the one side there is the divine and deifying will granting grace through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the human person; on the other side there is the human will which submits to the will of God in receiving grace and making it its own, and allowing it to penetrate all its nature. ²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 128.

²⁴ 2 Peter 1:4 (RSV)

²⁵ Lossky, pp. 126, 7.

The work and presence of the Holy Spirit clearly play a vital role in the manner of deification as understood in Orthodoxy. If Christ is 'Head of the Church which is his body', the Holy Spirit is He 'that filleth all in all.'²⁶ It is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes all things, according to St. Basil:

Christ and the Spirit is inseparable from Him. There are workings of miracles and gifts of healing, through the Holy Spirit. Demons are driven out by the Spirit of God. The Devil was stripped of his power in the presence of the Spirit. Sins are remitted by the grace of the Spirit . . . Familiarity with God, through the Spirit . . . the resurrection from the dead, by the operation of the Spirit.²⁷

For our discussion here, the work of the Holy Spirit is significant in that through his presence in the human person He bears witness to the Son - as the Son came in the name of the Father, to make known the Father. "One does not think of the Father without the Son", says St. Gregory of Nyssa, "one does not conceive of the Son without the Holy Spirit. For it is impossible to attain to the Father except by being raised by the Son, and it is impossible to call Jesus Lord save in the Holy Spirit".²⁸ The Holy Spirit, therefore, in coming to dwell in us, makes our being the throne of the Holy Trinity, for the Father and the Son are inseparable from the deity of the Spirit. And the vision of the Trinity, the Beatific vision, is the sovereign focal point of revelation and Christian existence. The dogma of the Holy Trinity, in Orthodox theology, is not the result of abstract thinking or speculation. It is taken as primordial fact.

²⁶ Ephesians 1:23 (KJV)

²⁷ Lossky, p. 157.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 159, 60.

We have now reached the end goal of deification. We have seen in St. Gregory Palamas, the Church Fathers, and contemporary Orthodox theology that the spiritual life begins in a human life at the time of Holy Baptism. The whole life of a Christian, therefore, may be viewed as an unfolding or blossoming of all the riches of the life of the Holy Spirit, the bearer of "every good gift and every perfect gift (which) is from above". 29

"For the mystical tradition of Eastern Christendom, says Lossky, 'Pentecost', which confers the presence of the Holy Spirit and the first-fruits of sanctification upon human persons, signifies both the end and final goal, and, at the same time, marks the commencement of the spiritual life. As He descended upon the disciples in tongues of fire, so the Holy Spirit descends invisibly upon the newly-baptized.."³⁰ Through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation the Holy Spirit re-creates our nature by purifying it and uniting it to the body of Christ. He also bestows "baptismal grace", which is actually the presence within us of the Holy Spirit. It is the life of the Trinity which dwells within us and deifies us.

This is the way of deification leading to the Kingdom of God which is introduced into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, even in this present life. Jesus once said, "the Kingdom of God is within you." ³¹ St. Gregory Nazianzen, Evagrius Ponticus, St. Maximus, and other Church Fathers identified the perfect knowledge of the Trinity with the Kingdom

29 James 1:17 (KJV).

30 Lossky, p. 170.

31 Luke 17:21 (KJV).

of God; the ultimate perfection to which all created being are called.

In conclusion, I have attempted in this chapter to lay a more solid theological foundation for what is known in Orthodox spirituality as the way of deification. In studying and explicating some of the doctrines of the so-called mystical theology of the Eastern Church, I have discovered many of the Christological and anthropological concepts are so construed as to be true to the Biblical concepts of God and Man.

I believe that the understanding of human existence found in the writers we have been studying is very close to an acceptable interpretation of Pauline anthropology as expressed in Romans 7 (and part of chapter 8). Paul had a historical view of anthropology: man is not always the same being in history. This view is evident, I believe, throughout Paul's writings and confirmed by the radical change apparent in the lives of the Apostles and other Christians ever since Pentecost. In Romans 8 Paul describes "life in the Spirit". In Romans 8:2 Paul states his thesis and then gives the interpretation in vss. 3-11. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." And in v. 4 Paul gives his definition of Christian existence as life "according to the Spirit".

This thesis of Romans 8:2 tells us what the redemption in Christ has done and means for human existence. The redemption may be described as an inner process, eschatological in character or goal-oriented. It begins when the person receives the gift of the Spirit (in baptism), the indwelling of Christ (cf. 8:10). But the Spirit is already given in the present, even though it is a process which ends

in the eschaton. A parallel passage ³² (Romans 6:1-11) also describes this process which the total or whole person undergoes. For further study of Pauline anthropology I refer the reader to several noted contemporary theologians who have dealt with this subject. (see foot-notes below). ³³

Lossky states that "the tradition of the Eastern Church knows the creature tending towards deification, transcending itself continually in grace. It knows also the fallen creature, separating itself from God to enter upon a new existential plane - that of sin and death." ³⁴

This statement summarizes the view of man central and integral to a grasp of the existential theology of the Eastern Church. This view, in my opinion, has validity in this our modern era. The thesis of this paper is that a cure is needed in order to reverse an unhealthy process - that of an increasing lack of concern for the living God revealed in Christ. This is the way of sin and death: separation from, or a void of any personal relationship with, God. The cure, then, is to be seen in man re-directing his energy, his mind, heart, spirit, body, and will, in short, his total being, toward a new horizon.

³² Romans 6:1-11.

³³ 1. C.K.Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).
 2. Rudolf Bultmann, Romans 7 and the Anthropology of Paul, in his Existence and Faith, (New York: Meridian Books, 1960).
 3. Ernst Käsemann, Perspectives on Paul, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).
 4. E.W. Smith, "The Form and Religious Background of Romans VII 24-25a", Novum Testamentum, XIII (1971), 127-135.

³⁴ Lossky, p. 241.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." 35

35 Matthew 5:8 (RSV) .

Chapter 5

MONASTICISM IN A NEW AGE OF THE SPIRIT

"PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT"

Father,

I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures - I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father. ¹

In this simple yet profound prayer is to be discovered the essential ideal guiding the life of every companion of the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation: to surrender all dependence except dependence upon the Living Lord. This prayer is repeated daily throughout the year by companions at the Priory, as well as in the private devotional lives of companions of the Order living in various parts throughout the world. This is the Way of the Spirit, the Way of Perfection to which the OAR is committed in this decade of the 'seventies, the dawning of the new age of the Spirit.

What, then, is the reason for being, the *raison d'être*, of the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation in our modern era? From a brochure on the statement of purpose of the OAR, printed in 1976, the Prior, Fr. Enrico Molnar, states: "Religious communities are forming islands of peace in a sea of corruption, ugliness and vulgarity. One isn't with-

¹ Charles de Foucauld, cited in Praise Him (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1973) p. 36.

drawing from the fight, one is fighting in another way (St. Matthew 5:9)."

The OAR believes that prayer is the main weapon and the chief activity of the followers of Christ. As mentioned in the Introduction, the companions do not love the world less, but Christ more. Contemplation itself is a real form of action, with its own special demands and sacrifices as outlined in the chapter on "the desert experience". We saw how Moses, Elijah, Hosea, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the Desert Fathers, and the saints down the ages, were each compelled to seek out the solitude, the silence, and the stark reality of desert and wilderness experience. It was from their living lives of utter surrender and dependence upon the absolute reality of God as He revealed Himself to be, that they experienced first-hand the power and love (Agape) and gifts of the Spirit needed to shape, direct, and govern human life and all creation according to the purposes of God.

That prayer is the most effective weapon of the Christian not only is affirmed throughout the Scriptures but is also confirmed in the practical experience of the ages.

As Thomas Merton pointed out ², it was in the deserts of Asia, in periods of vast solitude, that Teilhard de Chardin acquired his perspective of a "remarkable mystique of secularity" which is certainly necessary for our time. So too, Bonhoeffer, sometimes regarded as an opponent of all that monasticism stands for, himself realized the need for certain 'monastic' conditions in order to maintain a true perspec-

² Thomas Merton, Contemplation in a World of Action (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 27.

tive in and on the world. He developed these ideas when he was awaiting his execution in a Nazi prison.³ So, from the time of the prophets of old in the Old Testament to our modern day prophets, we see clear evidence of the significant role of solitude and contemplation (expectant and active awareness of new ways of looking at reality, or discovering new dimensions of reality) in developing a vision of reality that is creatively responsive to the needs of each new contemporary society as well as true to the redemptive vision and reality of the Paschal Mystery fixed permanently in time in and through the Death-Resurrection experience of Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of this thesis I set out to show how contemporary monastic communities offer a unique approach and alternative to today's problems posed to the church and the message of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. I have tried to point out that monasticism, as both a theological response and lived way of life, plays a vital and necessary role in modern society. If nothing else, as the editor of "New Life" magazine said,⁴ the religious are "holy examples" to those of us carrying on a more secularized existence. However, I believe that the corporate witness of truly agape-filled communities, such as I have experienced personally as a companion of the OAR, is essential to a world hungry and desperate for genuine Christian spirituality. These communities are offering to us a living hope in the immediate present for the promised future Kingdom of Heaven.

³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴ Supra, p. 12.

In a time when theologians themselves are groping for meaning among the fragmented segments of our complex and pluralistic culture, the holistic, and integrated vision of reality found in the traditional Biblical and mystical theologies, and the current theo-ecology and Teilhardian explorations of space theology of monasticism has much to say to us.

Perhaps a further word must be said concerning the theological response of the OAR, and similar modern contemplative communities, to today's culture.

Reference was made in the previous chapter to the fact that we are now living in a culture characterized by a "pluralism of theologies" (Lonergan). I also gave what are the principles, derived from contemplative insight and the approach of mystical theology, adopted by contemporary monastic theologians in order to insure sound theological reflection.

Besides dependence on Scripture, Tradition, and reason as criteria of authority or justification, the role of contemplative insight and experience play a predominant part in developing a living, theological outlook responsive both to the accumulated truth passed down from the past and to the flux of a space-age, secular culture.

In the OAR, we do not ignore the wisdom of either the past or that transported to us from foreign cultures, such as the holistic and well integrated view of man, God, and the world given to us by the hesychast theology of Orthodoxy. And following the pattern incorporated into the life-style of the contemplative community near London (the "Anchorhold") of which Fr. Herbert Slade is director, the OAR is

a theological "family" in which companions are learning in various forms of contemplation to assimilate and communicate their insights into truth.

In the Old Testament we read of schools of prophets, and Jesus continued this tradition by selecting and training twelve disciples. The early Church was a loosely connected group of family churches, meeting together for prayer and sharing the truth they had by incorporating others into their life. "Theology", says Fr. Slade, "having moved away from the concept of a single statement of truth to which all must conform and recognising the legitimacy of a pluralism of theologies, is now free to encourage the growth of theological families grouped around certain leaders . . ." ⁵

As Fr. Slade points out, within the theological family there most certainly will be a "multiplication of contradictions and paradox". He reminds us that these are the marks of the New Testament theology and indeed of all truth which is partly apprehended and partly expressed.

It is a mistake to attempt to iron out all the contradictions and paradox in one's own theology let alone in the theology of a group. The Church does not settle matters by means of a majority discovered by a democratic vote. Our own Church warns us that even general councils may go wrong when things are settled in this way. Truth is discovered and expressed in the Church by the growth of a common mind worked upon by the Holy Spirit. It takes a long time to form and during the waiting much patience is needed in order to live with our contradictions and accept the paradox. ⁶

Under these conditions the contemplative family has to learn to pray. It means loving with compassion those whose insight we cannot

⁵ Herbert Slade, Exploration into Contemplative Prayer (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 156.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 156, 7.

accept. A great deal of patience and waiting on the Lord is necessary, too. But this is all part of the purpose for the existence today of contemplative and study centers such as the OAR, sharing the responsibility of proclaiming what we have seen to the world.

We may now go a step further and look at the broader response of monasticism to culture and the "non-religious" world. We may summarize the stance of contemporary monastic life in terms of certain combined elements of H. Richard Niebuhr's ⁷ category of "Christ and culture in paradox" and the view which sees faith, or Christian existence, acting to transform culture.

Merton, probably the best known contemplative monk of this century, wrote about the necessity of being "open" to the world. The monk must be able to understand the problems of our time and see his monastic vocation in the light of these problems: race, war, genocide, starvation, injustice, revolution. Culture, therefore, is affirmed, but not everything in it is necessarily good. At some point the Christian must draw the line, he is in the world but not of the world.

The decisions we all make concerning the future require great care and discrimination. I believe a Christian of necessity must turn a critical eye upon every significant aspect of modern culture, and especially the process and attitudinal view inherent in secularization. Merton clearly spells out the danger of too closely identifying with the "now" culture: "Openness to the 'world' must not come to mean a merely

⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

uncritical and superficial acceptance of everything that is said in the mass media of one's particular country. A monastic community can entirely lose its prophetic sense and witness when it identifies itself with some particular party or nation." ⁸

A word descriptive of the relationship between faith and culture in Merton's writings is "dialogue". Part of being "open" to the world is to listen to what all sectors of society and inquiry are saying. We need to know modern psychiatry, history, science, and philosophy - both Eastern and Western. Merton himself died in Bangkok, Thailand in December of 1968 while living in dialogue with Zen Buddhists and discovering many points of contact between West and East.

Most important, Merton asserts, the mystical theology of the monk must be related to the technological culture of our century. "The qualitative, experiential and personal values developed in monastic life should complement the objective, quantitative and experimental discoveries of science and their exploitation by technology and business . . . The monastery should be capable of being a place of dialogue, non-technical and nonexpert, no doubt, but a place where men of our time would feel they could encounter and somehow 'touch' a deep and existential experience of the Mystery of Christ as lived and revealed in a community of men who really measure up to the challenges and promises of a contemplative vocation." ⁹ In this context of being "open to the world" Merton also makes the interesting statement that "contemplative communities may find that they have a great deal to say to these people

⁸ Merton, p. 216.

⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

who seek spiritual insight but who, generally speaking, are bored to death with preachers and utterly deaf to Christian apologetics. The only Christian communities that still retain some meaning for these people are contemplative communities." ¹⁰

Let us turn to a description of the contemplative vocation itself as it is lived out in actual experience in order to understand more fully the inner workings of monastic life which are designed to develop the qualitative, experiential and personal values mentioned by Merton.

The Religious Life is not merely a devout existence given to much church going. It is that, but it is much more than that. The word "religious" is said to mean "under bond" or "under rule". The "Religious" are men and women who have bound themselves by a vow to God to live their lives in a community under a rule according to Scriptural precepts and counsels. The majority of Christendom knows of religious Orders. There are religious communities in Eastern Orthodoxy, in Roman Catholicism, in Anglicanism, among Lutherans and Reformed Christians (e.g. Taizé in France).

What is the particular life style of the Order of Agapé & Reconciliation? The OAR Rule, containing original contributions to the disciplined life of an intentional community, has its beginning in a mystical experience and revelation; it also includes features and adaptations of other monastic rules, such as: (a) Premonstratensian (St. Norbert, 1080-1134, had a mystical experience in 1111; five years later he found the valley he had been shown in the vision - "prémontré" - and

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

established the Premonstratensian Abbey of Prémontré near Laon. The Rule insisted on (vegetarianism), a definite course of study, and a moderate balanced discipline for both men and women; (b) Carthusian with its emphasis on semi-eremitcal privacy; (c) Benedictine with its combined insistence on good discipline with respect - almost psychological - for human personality and individual capabilities, and with time divided between prayer, study and work; and (d) Franciscan with the founder's contagious joy and love, and theo-ecological concern for everything that breathes, lives and has its being. To this are added some flexible features which the founder of the OAR has observed on Holy Mount Athos of Eastern Orthodoxy. The OAR members also find inspiration in the precedent set by Blessed Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding (1592-1637) and his single-minded commitment to a family community life in accordance with Anglican principles. The Ferrar family consisted of Nicholas, in deacon's orders, his mother Mary, and the families of his brother and sister. The existence of married members of an Anglican Order, therefore, has this precedent dating back to the seventeenth century (1625-1646). The OAR is supra-national ("The age of Nations is past," wrote Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin). OAR companions are represented in six different countries.

The OAR is located fifty miles south-east of Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the Manzano Mountains - elevation 7,200 feet. The nearest town is five miles away over dirt roads, so the Priory, called "St. Michael's Forest Valley Priory", is in a place of quiet, restful beauty among tall pine trees. The sky is a clear blue, and at night the stars shine brightly.

In this natural setting, apart from the distractions and noise of city life, resident companions and visitors are able to lead quietly joyful lives. The three essentials of daily life at the Priory are silence, solitude, and the practice of the presence of Christ through prayer and worship. All of this provides a climate of spiritual maturity. As discussed in the chapters on the desert experience and monastic spirituality, it is this type of environment which is good for contemplation.

Resident companions are required to devote at least a quarter of an hour each day to reading and meditating on the Holy Scriptures (and other sacred writings). "We should approach this reading devotionally, seeking guidance of the Holy Spirit; with a patient mind, constantly renewed by faith, to discover our Lord's true countenance; and with a persevering determination to conform both our inward attitudes and our outward actions to the spirit of His liberating Gospel." (taken directly from the OAR Rule).

Study and research is an integral ingredient in the lives of OAR companions, especially those in residence. "And this is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." In these words, according to the Rule, are to be found the twin objects of study: the true knowledge in the knowledge of God. In addition to the devotional study of the Scriptures, companions are to recognize the Christian responsibility to pursue other branches of study, both sacred and secular. The area of study may be the life of one of the great spiritual leaders, such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Teilhard de Chardin, etc., thereby contributing to a

better understanding of the application of Christian principles to all questions that pertain to human brotherhood and the imitation of Christ. Classes and lectures given by the Prior at the Priory are offered on various occasions. Subjects include the Old and New Testaments, the Apocrapha, the prophets, and other areas of theological concern. ¹¹

To practice and develop an awareness of God's presence companions adopt the attitude that anything they do must be done in the awareness of God's presence. This is called the prayer of accompaniment. At first it is a very conscious effort, but little by little it reaches the level of habit and penetrates into the subconscious. Bro. Jacques of Taizé calls this process: "evangelizing one's own conscience". ¹²

The daily pattern of liturgical life at the Priory follows that of other Anglican Orders. Monastic life from its origins in antiquity has allowed appointed times or "hours" when the entire community comes together for corporate worship and prayer. At St. Michael's Forest Valley Priory an ordinary day begins at 7:00 a.m. with a service of Morning Prayer immediately followed by the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. At 12 o'clock the bell is rung for the reciting of the Noonday Office. At 5:00 p.m. Evening Prayer is offered and then, at the conclusion of the day, is said the Office of Compline. Since worship and prayer are the chief activities of the companions, these services are never done in a hurry. Ample time is purposely given for

¹¹ Currently (Spring, 1977) OAR companions are studying Fr. Slade's book, Exploration into Contemplative Prayer, quoted in this paper.

¹² Opinion expressed by Bro. Jacques, member of Taizé community, Taizé, France in a lecture given at the School of Theology at Claremont, December, 1976.

free intercessory prayers for any concern an individual or the community may have need or desire to express.

In our day of liturgical renewal, and in an ecumenical spirit, the OAR uses a variety of sources from several traditions, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, monastic as well as private devotional aids in a simplified fashion. This practice allows for a variety of expression and flexibility in worship, and avoids getting caught up in rigid legalism and over-repetition. By following a cycle of liturgical prayer based on the Christian Calendar, monastic life participates in a living tradition expressly designed to be an aid to the daily adoration of the Lord of the Living.

Needless to say, the Holy Eucharist, which is the 2,000 year old evidence of His faith in us and our faith in Him, must underlie any effort at reviving spirituality within the Church. Like Church life, it is a continuum and has a succession of use in apostolic tradition; yet like our life it is unique and new each day. Thus, renewal of our life and renewal of our spirituality are unthinkable without this, the greatest of the Divine Mysteries. The most immediately contemplative part of the liturgical expression of the Anglican tradition is the Holy Eucharist.

In the Anglican tradition the action of the Eucharist is "sacramental" in the sense that those who participate in receiving the outward symbols of bread and wine, and in listening to the word of God spoken outwardly and receiving it inwardly in the heart, experience a true communion with the living Lord who is present. As we repeat in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, "that he may dwell in us, and we in

Him." (p. 81). We are to contemplate this presence of the Lord both outwardly through the visible action, e.g. the "break of the bread" performed by the Priest, and to realize the reality of His presence within our lives, individually and corporately. This experience is truly contemplative in that in the Holy Eucharist is summed up, liturgically, the mystery of Christ's redemption, indeed the whole drama of salvation. It is an experience involving the whole person: sight, touch, hearing, tasting, and speaking.

In our time a great deal has been spoken in favor of striking a balance between an active, outer life of action, and the life of prayer, meditation, and the development of one's inner resources of spiritual vitality. Thomas Merton expresses well the connection between these two aspects of human life:

The new man for our time, the truly contemporary man who is the whole man, will be concerned about the overcoming of war, poverty, and racial discrimination, but if he permits these to be his only objects of concern, they will become more elusive than they now are. Only by a conscious and continuing nurture of his inner life can any man avoid the tragedy of killing the thing he loves. The person who supposes that he has no time to pray or to reflect, because the social tasks are numerous and urgent, will soon find that he has become fundamentally unproductive, because he will have separated his life from its roots. It will not then be surprising if, in his promotion of what seems to him to be a good cause, he becomes bitter in his condemnation of others. Without the concurrent cultivation of the inner and the outer life, it is almost inevitable that a man deeply involved in social action should become self-righteous. The specific problems of poverty and universal education involve a few elements of novelty, but the problems of the inner lives of those who work on poverty and education are not new at all. So far as can be discerned, there are no new sins; and it is doubtful that there is any new wisdom reserved for our time. In the cultivation of the inner life the dangers are always legion. There may be, in any specific situation, only one way of doing what is right, but there are always numerous ways of doing what is wrong. ¹³

¹³ Thomas Merton, "The New Man", Alive Now, 3:2 (May/June 1973), 19.

The primary object of the OAR is to connect contemplation and action. Following the example of the brothers of Taize, companions of the OAR are a "community in waiting", seeking direction from the Holy Spirit concerning every move and decision. In openness to the will of God, the OAR believes it has been called to be responsive to the needs of the times. At present, the Order serves the Diocese of New Mexico by conducting schools of prayer and teaching missions in Episcopal parishes throughout the State, thereby fulfilling its central work. There are thirty-five companions of the OAR living and working in or near Albuquerque who meet regularly for "chapter" meetings of study, prayer and worship.

The Priory itself serves as a spiritual retreat center for individual visitors and small groups who usually come for weekend retreats. ¹⁴ A retreat is a period of time (days and weeks) spent in retirement for the deepening of one's spiritual life. In essence the practice of retreats is older than Christianity, as we saw in the chapter on the desert experience. The forty days spent by Jesus in the wilderness have been considered the ultimate authority for its Christian use.

Forms of retreat vary from place to place, depending upon the particular need of the individual or group of retreatants. At the Priory of the OAR, most retreats are conducted in complete silence except for pre-determined times for listening to meditations and talks given by one leader or a team ministry. Individual counsel, personal

¹⁴ The word "retreat", unfortunately, is a negative term. It implies defeat, flight, and fear. Some new term is needed.

confession, and spiritual guidance are also available during the retreat. Retreatants are provided plenty of time for private meditation, silent walks, and rest.

In the OAR, retreats are considered more than merely periods of rest for tired and weary souls, important as these are in this mad, mad world of trying to beat the time-clock. In a positive sense, the retreat becomes for many a process of spiritual and inner healing, including healing of the physical body. This is an area of service for which a contemplative community may be particularly equipped because of the special faculties developed through contemplative prayer.

These faculties are sensitivity to the Spirit, insight into the presence of God in persons, and awareness of the deepest needs in individuals. These faculties are especially needed in making personal contact with people and evoking in them the response of faith. Last July, 1976, at the "Great Retreat" held at the Priory, twenty-two retreatants were led in a meditative process of inner healing called the "healing of memories". This was conducted by a priest-companion who is also a professional Ph.D. in counseling.

Fr. Slade views the Anchorhold center as a healing community for those who come with hearts needing healing and their lives recharged from the injuries they have sustained in the present-day world.

One of their functions is to provide places of retreat for people whose lives must be lived in the world. Such places need to be more than convalescent homes or places of physical silence. The Anchorhold model suggests that they need to consider the provision of forms of healing and contemplative activity, to counteract the complication of life in the world, with simplicity both of life and food, to train people not merely to relax but to deepen their

ways of contemplation so that their time in such conditions may be something more than mere consolation.¹⁵

At the Lambeth Conference of 1968, where leaders of the Anglican Communion gathered from all parts of the world, it was stated that one of the most important ways of renewing the Church in faith was through a growth in prayer and contemplation. It emphasized the need for Christians to play their part in this by learning to keep still and listen to God, and it pointed out that this involved "fostering each man's capacity for contemplation". Special reference was made to religious communities and the part they could play in this work. They were asked to take the lead and advised to make "a reappraisal of traditional methods of prayer and to develop new and modern methods". To this task the OAR has set its sights and given its energies.

Contemplative prayer is simply "loving and seeing God". This is what we are made for and our goal in life. In this sense and meaning of "contemplation", this experience as described in this thesis should be the normal occurrence of a lively faith of all Christians. Truly the contemplative experience is the deepest of all experience of the deepest of all facts of existence. Contemplation of the Living Lord is leading people not away from the world but into a relationship with One who is engaged in an adventure of cosmic renewal in which human beings of every nation are being inspired and prepared to take a part. As fragments of our one humanity we find ourselves caught up in a process of earthly and heavenly reconstruction.

¹⁵ Slade, p. 12.

Contemplation is in no sense a "cop out" in the fight to correct the problems of this world. In fact, it is here in the realm of the invisible order of reality that the true battle is being fought. St. Paul was right on target when he wrote the Christian Church at Ephesus: "For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens." ¹⁶ In verse 18 Paul goes on to add: "Give yourselves wholly to prayer and entreaty; pray on every occasion in the power of the Spirit. To this end keep watch and persevere, always interceding for all God's people . . ."

In conclusion, I would like to present the possibility of a cure available in the alternative response of contemporary monasticism to the illness of an unhealthy condition of spiritual decay infecting our secular world. We have been examining this problem within the larger context of the issues of (1) the relationship between Christian faith and culture, (2) secularization and its impact upon faith and the world, (3) the theological response of contemporary monasticism, and (4) the mode of action in the world offered by monastic communities. The cure previously mentioned may be summed up in the phrase, "contemplation in action". This implies both the particular vision of reality contained in the view of a contemporary theology which adopts a holistic view of the created universe and a responsible ethical response to this view and belief.

Once again, I find Merton an articulate spokesman. He sees the

¹⁶ Ephesians 6:12 (NEB).

cure in terms of what he calls a "monastic therapy" expressing a state of insight into "final integration". This latter term Merton uses is borrowed from Dr. Reza Arasteh, a Persian psychoanalyst who practices and teaches in America. Dr. Arasteh, Merton says, is interested in the final and complete maturing of the human psyche on a transcultural level. This state of maturity requires a psychic rebirth into a new transcultural identity.

The man who has attained final integration is no longer limited by the culture in which he has grown up. 'He has embraced all of life . . . He has experienced qualities of every type of life': ordinary human existence, intellectual life, artistic creation, human love, religious life. He passes beyond all these limiting forms, while retaining all that is best and most universal in them, 'finally giving birth to a fully comprehensive self.' He accepts not only his own community, his own society, his own friends, his own culture, but all mankind. He does not remain bound to one limited set of values in such a way that he opposes them aggressively or defensively to others. He is fully 'Catholic' in the best sense of the word. He has a unified vision and experience of the one truth shining out in all its various manifestations, some clearer than others, some more definite and more certain than others. He does not set these partial views up in opposition to each other, but unifies them in a dialectic or an insight of complementarity. With this view of life he is able to bring perspective, liberty and spontaneity into the lives of others. The finally integrated man is a peacemaker, and that is why there is such a desperate need for our leaders to become such men of insight.

It will be seen at once that this kind of maturity is exactly what the monastic life should produce. The monastic ideal is precisely this sort of freedom in the spirit, this liberation from the limits of all that is merely partial and fragmentary in a given culture. Monasticism calls for a breadth and universality of vision that sees everything in the light of the One Truth as St. Benedict beheld all creation embraced 'in one ray of the sun.'¹⁷

How does one attain such a unified vision of the One Truth?

According to Merton, this integrated insight implies an openness, an

¹⁷ Merton, p. 226.

"emptiness", a "poverty" similar to those described in such detail not only by the Rhemish mystics, by St. John of the Cross, by the early Franciscans, but also by the Sufis, the early Taoist masters and Zen Buddhists. "Final integration implies the voice, poverty and nonaction which leave one entirely docile to the 'Spirit' and hence a potential instrument for unusual creativity".¹⁸

The contemplative life isn't something objective that is "there" and to which, after fumbling around, you finally gain access. The contemplative life is a dimension of our subjective existence. Discovering the contemplative life is a new self-discovery. One might say it is the flowering of a deeper identity on an entirely different plane from a mere psychological discovery, a paradoxical new identity that is found only in loss of self. To find one's self by losing one's self: that is part of "contemplation." Remember the Gospel, "He who would save his life must lose it."¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 352.

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